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AN UNCROWNED KING

SYDNEY C. GRIER

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AN UNCROWNED KING

A ROMANCE OF HIGH POLITICS

BY

SYDNEY C. GRIER, *S.A.M.*

AUTHOR OF "IN FURTHEST IND," "HIS EXCELLENCE'S
ENGLISH GOVERNESS," ETC.

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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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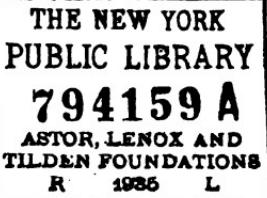
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PREFACE.

On the appearance of a former book of mine, exception was taken by several reviewers to the fact that the notes which acknowledged it to be a work of fiction, and not a genuine historical document, were relegated to the Appendix instead of being placed in the fore-front of the volume. My critics have treated me with such uniform kindness that I hasten to reciprocate their courtesy so far as is in my power by assuring them at once that the present work has no pretensions to be considered an historical novel, or even a *roman à clef*. It does not aim at describing a real succession of events, and the principal personages are not intended to represent actual public characters, either living or dead. I have been informed by more than one high authority that the leading idea of the book is an impossibility, while from others I learn that a similar case did really occur. In face of such a conflict of testimony in a matter of the first importance to the story, it will be evident that I cannot venture to vouch for the authenticity of any of the minor incidents, and still less for that of the order in which they appear,

although it is my private opinion that students of high politics will be able to parallel all, or nearly all, of them from their own experience. In that case, it must be the arrangement of the events, rather than the events themselves, which is to blame for any lack of probability in the narrative, and to this objection I can only reply that although truth may be stranger than fiction, fiction is more adaptable than truth. If the poet be allowed to "give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name," the story-teller may be permitted—nay, is compelled by the requirements of his work, to give to a disconnected and apparently resultless assemblage of incidents a thread of connection and a termination.

In the same way no seeker after information need hope to gain from reading this story a clearer idea of the topography or history of any existing Balkan state, as I have done my best to sketch merely the general notion, so to speak, of a Balkan state, taking features and accidents from all, but adopting all the characteristics of none. After this confession it will be plain that the book is simply a romance of to-day, or, if you will, a story founded on hypothesis.

May I add, for the information of my American readers, that the Llandiarmid pronunciation of the name Cærleon is *Carlean*, whence naturally arises the form *Carlino*?

S. C. G.

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AN UNCROWNED KING



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AN UNCROWNED KING.

CHAPTER I.

A KINGDOM GOING BEGGING.

“AFTER question-time, the First Lord of the Treasury “rose to make a statement with regard to the course “of public business, the salient feature of which was “the announcement that the Government found them-“selves compelled to appropriate all the time of private “members during the remainder of the session. We “understand that this action on the part of the Min-“istry has aroused strong feeling on both sides of the “House, particularly among those members who have “charge of private bills. One of the supporters of “the Government who has been very hardly treated “is Viscount Usk, whose bill for permitting peers to “become candidates for seats in the Lower House, on “relinquishing their right to a seat in the House of “Lords, had obtained the first place in the ballot for “Tuesday next.”

Thus far the ‘Fleet Street Gazette,’ but “strong feeling” was a mild term to apply to the sentiment

evoked in the minds of honourable members by the Government statement. That a portion of their time would be confiscated they had guessed only too well, but such a drastic measure as this was quite unexpected. Rage, disappointment, and disgust were depicted on face after face along the back benches, and the popular Minister to whose task it fell to make the announcement was allowed to resume his seat without a single expression of approval. Among the most wrathful of the malcontents was Lord Usk, whose cup had been dashed from his lips in the peculiarly cruel manner noticed sympathetically by the 'Fleet Street,' and who sat moodily in his place, gnawing the end of his moustache, his forehead drawn into a heavy frown. Mr Forfar, the First Lord, lounging delicately from the House after hurling his thunderbolt, with his short-sighted eyes fixed on space, on the paper in his hand, on anything but the scowling faces of his supporters, encountered his gaze without intending to do so, and leaned over the benches to speak to him.

"Rather rough on you, Usk. Better luck next time!"

"It's all very well for you to laugh——" began Lord Usk, savagely, and then stopped short, finding that he was making rather a weak remark, whereas he had meant to say something cutting. Mr Forfar waved his hand soothingly, and passed on with a smile.

"If it had been any one but Usk," he said to his colleague, Sir James Morrell, when they were outside the House, "I should have thought he meant ratting, but he is quite safe. He gets excited now and then, but he will sulk to-night and be all right to-morrow."

After a time Lord Usk also quitted the House, and

went to the library to see whether there were any letters for him. There were none of any interest, and he was toying somewhat aimlessly with the magazines on one of the tables, when he descried looming in the distance the form of the party Whip, intent on beating up recruits for the dinner-hour. The sight roused him again to fierce resentment. On ordinary occasions Usk was the mildest of men, and one of the Whip's pattern members, not only voting safely with the party in important divisions (with the exception of occasional outbursts on the question of Temperance and kindred subjects, which were dealt with tenderly as the eccentricities of youth), but proving himself almost always ready to dine in the precincts, in case of a call during the dinner-hour. But now his forbearance had been strained too far, and he rebelled. He was not going to help to keep a house for a Government which valued his services as little as did this one, and he evaded the Whip with some difficulty, for his height rendered him conspicuous among the other members, and slipped out into Palace Yard.

"I'll take a night off, and drop in at Mrs Sadleir's," he thought, his resentment already beginning to give way under the soothing recollection of his revenge on the Whip.

Mrs Sadleir's was one of the few houses at which Usk was at all a constant guest, for he hated society with an almost anarchist hatred quite at variance with his political opinions generally. Very quickly, on his first introduction into the world of London, he had learnt by bitter experience to divide the women he met into two categories. There were those who were anxious to marry him, either personally, or vicariously to some relation, and those who were not. It was in

vain that he tried by turns to gain the reputation of a student, a cynic, and a misogynist; the young ladies and their mothers still thought that a man in his present position, to say nothing of his prospect of succeeding to the Marquisate of Caerleon at no very distant date, ought not to be judged too harshly, even for such unamiable peculiarities as these. This led him to forswear almost entirely the company of the fair sex, for the young ladies who did not want to marry him made the fact so conspicuous, and were so anxious to force it upon his notice, that he resented their aggressive prudery as strongly as he did their sisters' too evident wiles. Hence he was wont, now that his experience was gained, sternly to resist all attempts to allure him into general society, and he had become known to the party leaders as a young man who devoted himself to the study of sociological and political problems, and affected the company of his elders. But he was content to visit at Mrs Sadleir's house, and under her wing to confront the hordes of society girls who thirsted for his prospective coronet, since he knew that she had neither daughter nor niece to recommend him as a wife, and that she had a most unfeminine aversion to match-making. Mrs Sadleir had been a dear friend of his mother's, and on Lady Caerleon's death had done much to supply her place to Usk and his brother Cyril. Ill-natured persons said that she was trying to achieve a social success by becoming the second Lady Caerleon, but better-informed people scouted the idea, knowing well that she had refused Lord Caerleon very decidedly two years after his wife's death, although without any diminution of the friendship which had always existed between them.

For a rising young politician of pronounced im-

perialist views, like Usk, Mrs Sadleir's house was emphatically one to visit. Her husband, who had held an important permanent post in the Foreign Office, had gathered around him in his leisure hours men of all nations with whom he came in contact in the course of his duties, and after his death his widow found herself unable to dispense with the excitement of the brilliant society to which she had grown accustomed. It was a commonplace among her friends that, in most cases, she could, if she liked, announce forthcoming diplomatic changes before the ministers who arranged them, and some said that a good deal of the political history of Europe had been made at different times in her drawing-room. Yet she was not an intriguer, far less a conspirator, but simply a cultivated, tactful woman, with a talent for bringing together at the right time the right people, or, at any rate, the people who it was desirable should meet one another. She came forward now to greet Lord Usk, as he mounted her staircase, and made him a sign to wait until she had got rid of a voluble Italian secretary of embassy, who was impressing some fact upon her with a good deal of gesticulation. Mrs Sadleir's gracious and striking personality was reflected in her dress. Her gown was black, made in a severe yet fanciful style that was unlike any one else's. On her head she wore an arrangement of black lace, which was no more to be called a cap than a veil, and was the despair of her maid, but which, taken in conjunction with her bright dark eyes and the silver hair rolled smoothly back from her forehead, gave her the look of a great lady of the old *régime*. Having disposed of the Italian, she turned to Usk.

"I am very glad indeed that you have come in to-

night, Usk, for I have some one here whom you will enjoy meeting. I was almost inclined to send a message to you at the House by Dr Egerton, who was going on there; but I thought you might come, and therefore I waited. It is M. Drakovics to whom I want to introduce you."

"What! the Kossuth of the Balkans—the Thracian premier?" asked Usk, much interested.

"Yes, the great history-maker of to-day. It is a liberal education (pray don't think I intend a pun) to hear him talk. Come and I will take you to him."

She did not lead him into the crowded drawing-room, full of light and laughter, but into a smaller room near at hand, where a solitary gentleman in evening dress was dimly visible by the rays of a Moorish lamp hanging in a window-recess. He was a small shrunken man, with a large bald head and a massive brow; and as Usk's eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, he saw in the bronzed face and heavy grey moustache the hint of a likeness to another and a more successful statesman than the Hungarian patriot, a likeness which was, moreover, not altogether distasteful to M. Drakovics himself.

"Lord Usk—M. Drakovics," said Mrs Sadleir, briskly. "Now I am going to leave you to have a good talk, for I want you to know one another. If you will sit here in the recess, the curtains will hide you, and you will not be seized upon by any troublesome acquaintances."

"Milord," said M. Drakovics, bowing formally, but scanning Usk from head to foot in a way which made the younger man feel that he was being reckoned up and his measure taken, "I am much honoured in meeting you. Your name, and your father's name also, are very well known to us in Thracia."

"You are very kind," said Usk, in the embarrassed way in which the average Englishman receives a compliment. "I'm sure I am delighted to have the chance of meeting you here. I never expected to be able to hear about the Thracian revolution from one who was in it."

"From one who may be said to have been at the head of it," corrected M. Drakovics, gravely. "You are interested in Eastern Europe, milord?"

"Naturally, since no one who takes any interest whatever in international politics can well avoid keeping his eye on the Balkan States," said Usk; "and Thracia has always seemed to me the most promising of them all, if only she got a chance. Your long struggle against Roum, and the way in which you won your freedom, have shown what your people are made of."

"Yes, indeed," responded M. Drakovics, his eyes lighting up, "Thracia is the nation of the future in Eastern Europe. We are the only truly European race south of the Carpathians. The Moesians are Slavs, the Dardanians half Roumis. Our blood is chiefly Latin, with a large Teutonic admixture. Our very language is far more nearly akin to the Italian than to the Slavonic."

"And yet your own name is Slavonic?" suggested Usk.

"Most of our names are, just as in religion we belong to the Orthodox Church. It is the result of our isolation, hemmed in as we are by Slav races. But our aspirations are wholly Western, and the national hatred of Scythia, our great Slav neighbour, is a perfect passion."

"That was the cause of your revolution, wasn't it?"

asked Usk. "We are generally rather misty about your politics here, I'm afraid, but that seems to have penetrated into most people's minds."

"It was the cause," returned M. Drakovics. "You are aware, milord, that when we threw off the Roumi yoke, many years ago, we did so with the assistance—the moral support—of Scythia. For this assistance we have been paying dearly ever since, while our country has groaned under the rule of the House of Franza. No doubt the simplest plan would have been to place a Scythian grand-duke at once upon the throne, but it was more politic to allow us to elect a national sovereign, and then to make him a Scythian tributary. Our first king, Alexander Franza, the patriot who had conducted the struggle for freedom to a successful issue, saw the danger, and tried to avert it, straining every nerve to pay off the loans advanced by Scythia for various purposes; but he died before he could effect this object, and his successors, instead of following his example, borrowed more largely still, thus placing the kingdom completely in the hands of Scythia. You know what our history has been since our independence was guaranteed; how, with one of the finest countries in Europe, the resources of which are as yet scarcely touched, we have been constantly on the verge of bankruptcy. So it was when the late king, Peter II., ascended the throne, and our masters appeared to think that the time had come to complete their conquest. Of course he was a pensioner of Scythia, like his predecessors, but he was also a man of pleasure. When the country had been drained of money to supply his whims, he was forced to turn to Scythia once more. Money was granted him, but only for a consideration. One by one the highest posts in the army and Court

were filled with Scythians, and it was of no use for the Thracians to complain. The Sertchaeff Ministry was in power, and as matters grew worse, its members clung the more closely to their places, fearing the result of any change for themselves. Then a chance incident caused an explosion——”

“It was connected with your own election to the Legislative Assembly, was it not?” asked Usk.

“It was, milord. I had been absent from my country for many years, owing to my having once taken part in a meeting of those who wished to bring about a reform by means of constitutional agitation. I was a young man when I threw in my lot with the reformers, and had just begun to practise at the bar, but I was obliged to leave Thracia, and sacrifice all my prospects. My years of exile were not wasted. I travelled, I worked, I associated with earnest men—and I found my country a byword everywhere. At last I could endure it no longer, and I made up my mind to set on foot one more effort to stir up my compatriots to a sense of their degradation. I returned to Thracia, and found myself received with joy, yet with fear, by my old friends and by the younger generation of patriots that had sprung up. Once more we set ourselves to form a constitutional party, and to educate public opinion. Our objects were simple,—the dismissal of the Scythians who had been thrust into public offices, the reform of the whole corrupt administration, the discontinuance of the system of borrowing, and the gradual repayment of our debt to Scythia out of the money saved by reducing expenses and gained by the proper development of the country. We were quite ignorant of the extent to which our views found favour among the people, but we determined upon a bold stroke—in order both to

advertise our programme and to show us how we were supported. The Elections were approaching, and we resolved to contest every seat for which we could find a candidate. The Administration was utterly taken by surprise, but its members perceived that their salvation lay in striking at once, and they chose to begin with me. I was elected by a large majority for the constituency to which I offered myself, but my election was declared void by a Government decree, and a fresh poll was announced. Troops were drafted into the town, nominally to preserve the peace, in reality to force my constituents to vote for the Government candidate, and vast numbers of persons crowded in from the country districts, drawn by the prospect of a tumult. I was passing through the market-place when a band of my supporters called upon me for a speech. Then, milord, I felt a strange fire seize me. I remembered the effect, long before, of my speech to the meeting for taking part in which I was exiled. I remembered that in my days as barrister I had often moved the court to tears and to indignation. It was merely a flash of memory, but with it came the impulse to act. I sought a place from which to speak—I climbed upon a country cart—I spoke—I heard the people shouting—the Government agent ordered the soldiers to arrest me—I saw them pushing their way through the crowd—they closed round me, dragged me down—I appealed to the bystanders—I was rescued—I spoke again, and raised the cry of Reform. Before I knew what had happened I was at the head of a revolution, the people had put themselves under my guidance, the troops had joined us, the Government agent was seeking the means for flight. By my orders he was captured and lodged in prison—I seemed to per-

ceive at once what was to be done. The telegraph-office was seized, no message allowed to be sent but by my authority. To each of our candidates for the Assembly I telegraphed what had happened, and his orders. A brief pause to concert my plans with my chief supporters, and we were in motion again. The news spread through the country like wildfire; in a short time the whole army was with us, and the people were thronging to us in enormous numbers. We marched to Bellaviste, and entered the city without striking a blow. When we laid before the king our demands for a change of Ministry and a new constitution, he preferred to abdicate rather than grant them. We were nothing loath, and he has retired to the south of France on a suitable income. A provisional government was formed, and has remained in power, supported by the whole force of the national sentiment, for nearly a year. The success of our movement was due to its spontaneity. If we had prepared for it, Scythia would have gained some inkling of our plan, and might have out-plotted us, but she could not without any excuse interfere with the accomplished fact. In the very first moment of our freedom we ranged Pannonia on our side by making overtures to her for the conclusion of a commercial treaty which had hitherto been hindered by the intrigues of Scythia. To Scythia we were able to guarantee, through the good offices, secretly exercised, of Pannonia, the regular payment of her interest, and the gradual extinction of the debt itself, while the dismissed officials received honourable terms. It was not easy to arrange all this, for at first we found it difficult to obtain money, and the Thracians are hot-blooded and had much to avenge, but I would not remain at their head except with their promise to acquiesce in my

decisions. Balancing Pannonia against Scythia in this way, we have passed through a year of national life, although Scythia refuses to recognise us, and has worked upon our suzerain, Roum, to withhold from us up to the present time the right we claim of choosing our own form of government."

"Then, if that right were conceded, you would proclaim a republic?"

"Certainly not, milord. I myself might approve of such a step theoretically, but our people are not ripe for it, and not only Scythia, but Pannonia and the other friendly or neutral Powers, would be alienated by the idea. I look around me on the present chaotic state of the country, at the new Thracia which is rising out of the ruins of the old, and I see that it would be impossible for any man popularly elected to introduce the necessary reforms unless he were guaranteed dictatorial powers for a term of years; and for this we cannot hope. In spite of our marvellous success hitherto, we are not perfect, nor even unanimous, and there are many divisions and jealousies among us."

"It shows great self-abnegation on your part to give up the idea of a republic," said Usk, "for you yourself would be the only possible President."

"I fear you rate my moral qualities too highly, milord. The presidency would not be a bed of roses. Even as matters now stand, my life has already been attempted three times, and if I were President, Scythia would never rest until she had—well, brought about my removal, and had plunged Thracia into such a state of anarchy as might seem to justify her in the sight of Europe in interfering to restore order. Besides, I am a Thracian, one of the people, and they need some one who is above them and outside them to

rule them at present. This is the reason why we are seeking to re-establish the monarchy on a constitutional basis. This is the reason why I have come to England to offer the crown of Thracia to you, Milord Usk."

"Come to offer the crown to me!" repeated Usk, stupidly:

"I will not disguise from you, milord," said M. Drakovics, bringing his head very close to his hearer's, and speaking low and earnestly, "that we have made many attempts to obtain a king from the different reigning families of Europe. It was at first our great hope that we might secure one of the younger members of the English royal house, but this honour has been absolutely refused to us, and it was the same with several German princely families. We offered the crown to Prince Otto Georg of Schwarzwald-Molzau, the King of Moesia's cousin, whose family were willing that he should accept it, but he considered that the kingdom was likely to be too troublesome to be agreeable. We had even thought of a French prince, but there is the religious difficulty——"

"But I do not belong to the Greek Church, and I have no intention of joining it," interrupted Usk.

"We could accept a Protestant, milord, but a Roman Catholic would be impossible."

"But I am not even remotely connected with royalty," objected Usk again.

"It is the boast of you English nobles that you are on a level with any of the princely houses of the Continent that are not absolutely royal," said M. Drakovics, "and you are far richer."

"Not our family, at any rate," said Usk, with a shrug. "But I have had no experience in governing.

Why don't you ask some one who has been Viceroy of India or Lord Lieutenant of Ireland?"

"Because they are old, milord, and you are young: our young nation needs a young man at its head. But you are not a novice in the affairs of State. Who is so fit to introduce constitutional principles into Thracia as a member of the British House of Commons—one, moreover, who has shown himself friendly to any reasonable reform judiciously and fairly carried out? Nor would you find the actual work of governing a very difficult matter. I, who have been said to be the Revolution, am now the Government. I make the laws, and then command them to the people, and this would continue to be the case as long as I was so happy as to retain your confidence, while you acted as the visible head of the Government and the sign of the unity of the nation."

"As the figurehead, in fact?" said Usk.

"Precisely, milord."

"But you ought to have a soldier, and I am not one."

"You are an officer of Volunteer cavalry, and that is sufficient."

"You seem to know a good deal about me."

"It is natural to study deeply the history of one's future king, milord, and you appear to be better fitted for the high post I offer you than any of the other noblemen to whom my thoughts have turned."

"But this is absurd!" cried Usk. "You must know that I should not be allowed to entertain such an idea for a moment. Our Government would put a stop to it instantly. It would be high treason, treaty-breaking—I don't know what."

"The matter is a secret, milord. Once in Thracia, and

crowned, your Government could scarcely bring you back."

"Do you expect me to give up my own country—make myself an outlaw, in fact—for the sake of your precious Thracia?"

"Yes, milord," said M. Drakovics, steadily, "that is what I do expect. You are the very man for us—by reason of your personal advantages especially. Our people worship tall fair men, for they recall to them the heroes of their legends. Then you are descended from a great house of warriors. Milord your father fought in the Crimea, your grandfather at Waterloo, and your great-uncle was killed fighting in the cause of Greek Independence. Again, you are unmarried, but yet you do not share the tastes of our late lamented sovereign, King Peter Franz, and you would thus be able to consolidate your dynasty and strengthen your kingdom by an advantageous matrimonial alliance."

"That is not the way in which English people are accustomed to look at marriage," said Usk, coldly.

"It is the way in which a patriotic king looks at the subject, milord. I am making no effort to disguise from you the drawbacks of the great position I offer you. We do not want a pleasure-seeker, but one who will be a martyr, if need be. We require a man who will give up his country, his friends, his own happiness—who will be ready either to live or to die for this Thracia of ours, which we have saved from Scythia and the Franzas."

M. Drakovics saw that his words had at last produced something of the effect he desired. Usk's head was lifted proudly, and the light of battle shone in his eyes, but his response was disappointing.

"I will consider the question," he said.

"Give me your promise, milord. Why should you hesitate? You are not thinking of palaces and the probable length of your Civil List, I know, so why not let me feel happy in the certainty that my country's future is assured?"

"I must consult my father. He has a right to be told."

"Come back to Thracia with me, and be crowned, and then tell him. He will be glad to be spared the trouble of advising you."

"No, it would not be fair to him. I will let you know some time to-morrow. Good night," and he left the room before M. Drakovics could stop him or even say anything further. His impulse was to get out of the house at once, and cool his heated brain by walking back to his lodgings, but he did not like to leave without bidding farewell to Mrs Sadleir. Entering the drawing-room in search of her, he was accosted by a man whom he knew slightly as connected in some way with the 'Daily Chronograph.'

"Nasty sell for you, wasn't it?" he remarked. Usk stared at him blankly.

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

"Why, this afternoon—about that Bill of yours. Have you forgotten it already?"

"Oh—my Bill," repeated Usk, vaguely. "I have been thinking of—of other things since then. Excuse me, I can't stay."

"He looks perfectly dazed," said the other man to himself. "What can it be? Has some girl chucked him? No! who's that talking to Mrs Sadleir? Drakovics, no less!"

He made his way towards his hostess, arriving just in time to hear her farewell to Usk.

"Perhaps you will have something to tell me tomorrow, Usk. If so, look in about three o'clock. I shall be quite alone."

"Nuts!" muttered the journalist. Then aloud to Mrs Sadleir he added, "Surely I saw our old friend Drakovics here just now?"

"Yes, he is here to-night," said the hostess. "We don't make a fuss about our foreign guests nowadays, and have receptions at Trentham House and public festivities for them, you see. They come and go quietly."

"Still looking for a king, eh? He has come to England to try and get hold of the latest royal infant as a ruler for his one-horse State, hasn't he?"

Clever woman though she was, Mrs Sadleir could occasionally be "drawn," and this the 'Chronograph' man knew well. She smiled now significantly as she answered—

"No, I really don't think he has designs on the Princess's baby this time. What, must you go?"

Indeed he must, post-haste to the 'Chronograph' office, bearing news which set editor, foreign editor, sub-editor, and printer frantically to work altering and cutting and curtailing the copy already set up in such a way as to provide room for a column with startling headlines:—

**"THE BALKAN QUESTION.
RECONSTRUCTION OF THE THRACIAN MONARCHY.
ROMANTIC CHOICE OF A KING.
CROWN OFFERED TO AN ENGLISH NOBLEMAN.
INTERVIEW WITH VISCOUNT USK, M.P."**

In justice to the journalist, it must be said that the account of the "interview" was very short, consisting chiefly of the true statement that Lord Usk had kept

his own counsel and declined to discuss the subject; but the foreign editor and his subordinates supplied a concise account of Thracia and its history and revolution to fill up the space, and to gratify the interest and curiosity of the British public, which developed both these qualities very largely on the morrow.

Usk was not a subscriber to the 'Daily Chronograph,' and his man-servant, who was, knew his duty far too well to put any questions to his master in the morning, although there was a flutter of pleased excitement diversifying his usual sober demeanour, which Usk noticed with a feeling of miserable surprise.

"Very likely I talked in my sleep," he said to himself, conscious of having spent a troubled night, and then he mapped out his plan of operations for the day. The morning must be spent at the House of Commons, where he was serving on an important Committee, but in the afternoon he would run down into Kent, to the country-house at which his father was staying, and tell Lord Caerleon all about M. Drakovics and his offer. Having arrived at this decision, he drove to the House without meeting any of his acquaintances, and did his best to concentrate his mind on the work of the Committee, although he could not help glancing furtively at Mr Forfar, who was stretching his long length a few seats from him, and wondering what he would say if he knew the honour which the Thracian Government was desirous of conferring upon his supporter. As it chanced, Mr Forfar had happened to glance at the 'Chronograph' before coming down to the House, and was now asking himself languidly whether it was Usk or the editor who had suddenly gone mad, but this Usk did not know. That the secret of his proposed elevation was not confined to himself, however, he

discovered as he left the committee-room, when one of his friends rushed past him in a hurry.

"Been reading a lot of lies in the 'Chronograph' about you, Usk," he cried cheerfully. "What rot those newspaper fellows will put in sometimes!"

Then it had got about already! Usk was literally unable to muster up the necessary courage to go and look at the paper, and as he quitted the House he felt guiltily that the members he met turned to look at him, and that the policemen who had the advantage of knowing him by sight were reaping a golden harvest for pointing him out to eager and ignorant questioners. He wanted to see what the 'Chronograph' said about him, and to know how it had gained its information, but it seemed much too barefaced a proceeding to walk into a shop and buy a copy. He would go home, and send his servant out to get one. But when he reached his lodgings he found that this was unnecessary. In the arm-chair in his sitting-room sat his father, with a copy of the delinquent journal in his hand.

"Well, Usk," said Lord Caerleon, "good morning. May I ask whether this is true?" and he held out the paper, which was folded in such a way as to exhibit the headlines to the best advantage.

"I don't know what they say there," returned Usk, "but it's true that Drakovics invited me last night to become King of Thracia. He said he came to England on purpose."

"Ah!" said Lord Caerleon, meditatively. "Seen Cyril this morning?"

"No," said Usk, surprised by the sudden question.

"Well, I have, and I can tell you what he is doing now. He is going about with my authority contradict-

ing this report, and talking big about libel actions against the 'Daily Chronograph.'

"That strikes one as rather premature, doesn't it?" said Usk, and his father knew by his tone that he was not pleased.

"It has got that appearance," he said quickly, "but these things spread so fast, and it had to be stopped before it brought you into trouble. Look here, Usk, I want you to give this thing up, and I'll tell you my reasons."

"Yes, sir?" and Usk prepared himself to listen.

"Well, the first is that I'm an old man, and I can't do without you. My father's elder brother, your great-uncle, went off to fight for Greece, as you know, and never came back. I can't give you up for that sort of thing at my age. Is that enough for you, Usk?"

"Certainly, if you put it in that way."

Lord Caerleon's eyes glistened, but he went on gruffly enough.

"My second reason is that you are not the man for it. Oh, I know that you would look the part all right, and do your utmost to make the thing a success, but there's more worldly wisdom in Cyril's little finger than in your whole body. If the fools had only thought of offering the crown to him, he would be at the head of a Balkan Confederacy in a month, but you—— The fact is, Usk, you are too English—you don't know when you're beaten. Instead of taking a licking quietly, you are up again as soon as you come to, and fighting with all the breath knocked out of you. As for Cyril, he will have made it up with the other chap after the first round, and started ahead to choose his own ground, ready for another fight when it's necessary, and that time Cyril will win."

"Shall I advise Drakovics to transfer his offer to Cyril, then?"

"Certainly not. I don't intend to subsidise a bankrupt Balkan State out of my rents, and I have no wish that you should be obliged to do it either. Cyril will come to smash quite soon enough without a crown to drag him down. He is so sharp that he is bound to go too far some day. No, Usk, you are the man for it if there was a fair field, but there isn't, and I can't stand your going off and being shot or dynamited by Scythian agents."

"But Mrs Sadleir must have known what Drakovics wanted, and yet she said nothing to dissuade me from accepting the crown."

"I daresay not. Women are always ready to send out sons and lovers on forlorn hopes—especially other people's sons and lovers. It requires a practical, unromantic man to look into the thing first, and decide whether the game is worth the candle. Mrs Sadleir is as sensible a woman generally as any I know, but she has not outlived her enthusiasms yet, and she is quite ready to give Thracia a king at my expense, and I don't see it. When I'm gone, it will be a different thing. You will have only yourself to please then, but the Thracians will probably have killed or banished two or three kings, and run through a few republics, by that time. In any case, I ask you, as a favour to me, to refuse this offer now."

"I will write to Drakovics at once," said Usk, and he did.

CHAPTER II.

FRESH WOODS AND PASTURES NEW.

A YEAR had passed, and the situation in Thracia remained unchanged. The search for a king initiated by M. Drakovics had not yet proved successful, but the Provisional Government was still in office, and the Thracians lived and thrrove under a regimen of what their enemies called autocracy washed down by draughts of rhetoric. M. Drakovics alone, against whose life two further attempts had been made, looked out ahead with troubled eyes, and yearned for the tall Englishman who had seemed likely to prove such an efficient coadjutor in his task of governing.

In England, however, the year had not been barren of changes. General Lord Caerleon slept with his fathers in the family burying-place in Llandiarmid Abbey, and Viscount Usk's place in the House of Commons knew him no more. Misfortune seemed to dog this young man's footsteps. Once again he had obtained leave to bring in his Bill, but it had been deliberately talked out by the Labour members in revenge for his voting against them on one of their pet questions. There was thus no help for him, and on his father's death he was compelled to vacate his seat,

and seek the serene retirement of the Upper House. Moreover, the constituents whom he was so sorry to leave did not display on this occasion the fixity of purpose with which he had always credited them, for they rejected with ignominy the candidate who inherited his principles, and chose as their representative an agitator who promised to bring in a Bill to divide the Llandiarmid domain among them in the shape of allotments.

Nor was this all, for before very long he found that even the possession of a historic house and innumerable heirlooms was not an unmixed privilege. The marquisate was by no means a rich one, for its inheritors had all indulged a reprehensible taste for investing their spare cash in works of art instead of more easily convertible securities, and the succession duty on these bade fair to ruin their unfortunate possessor. The owner of land which would not let, and of pictures which he could not sell, he found himself forced to raise the necessary money by means of mortgages on his unmanageable property, when all other means had failed. The interest on these mortgages was another important consideration, and when, after settling matters as far as possible, the new Marquis and his brother met one evening in the great hall at Llandiarmid to talk things over, the outlook was far from cheerful.

"It's quite evident that we can't keep up this place, Cyril," said Caerleon. "If I could let it for a year or so, and get the house in town off my hands, I think we might just tide over the present difficulty."

"Surely it would be enough to sell Caerleon House," said Cyril, lazily, but with some surprise in his tone, as he sat with his arms behind his head and looked at his

brother. "No one will expect you to entertain much here while you are in mourning, so you can lie low for a year or two and keep down expenses."

"It's not only of the actual expenses of the place this year that I am thinking," said Caerleon, "but of the future. I want to put things right for you, Cyril, and to do that I must save."

"Oh, don't trouble yourself about me," said Cyril, lightly. "I have always fallen on my feet hitherto, and I suppose you'll find me a crust and a shake-down in your diggings, wherever they are."

It had been a shock to Caerleon to discover, from some words his father had let fall on his deathbed, that he had made no special provision for Cyril, leaving him almost entirely dependent on his elder brother, and that this omission was due to design, and not to forgetfulness.

"I want you two to stick together," said the old Marquis to his elder son, "and therefore I have not left Cyril anything of his own. He has your mother's money, which will keep him from starvation, but for anything more he must come to you. He may have some consideration for your money, but he would be sure to speculate with anything that was in his own power."

Caerleon found this utterance hard to reconcile with the high opinion his father had once expressed of Cyril's shrewdness and worldly wisdom, and he also resented the arrangement as unfair to Cyril. What if he should desire to marry? Hence his eagerness to put matters on a more satisfactory footing.

"I am afraid that things will have to remain as they are just now," he said; "but you may be sure that as soon as possible I shall do what I can for you."

"Thanks, awfully," yawned Cyril. "But what about the present? When you have succeeded in leaving yourself without any rest for the sole of your foot except your London lodgings, what do you mean to do?"

"What is there to do?" asked Caerleon. "I can do no good in the Lords, and I can't stay in the Commons. They even take away from me the means of living on my own place——"

"And cultivating the higher faculties of your tenants, and making Llandiarmid a social centre for all the art and learning and enlightenment of the county," said Cyril. "Well, granted all this, what then?"

"Let us go abroad," said Caerleon, suddenly. "We haven't had a prowl together for years, and we can sink our titles and live on the cheap."

"By all means," said Cyril. "Let us leave our ungrateful country, which presents our ancestors with dinner-services and swords of honour and statues and plate, which we don't want and mustn't sell, and makes us pay duty on them. The wide world is before us. Where shall we turn? I say, let us go to Kashmir and shoot mountain sheep, or Polar bears, or my lord the elephant, or anything we may come across."

"Won't do," said Caerleon. "I should have you knocking up again, right away from all medical help. It must be somewhere nearer home."

"Oh, let's go to Bournemouth or Torquay, then. So cheerful, and so novel, and plenty of doctors."

"No, I know. We will go to Hungary and look up Gyula Temeszy. He promised us some wolf-hunting if ever we came to see him."

"Very well. I haven't met him since he came down to Eton to see his old tutor again, and tipped me a

sov. because I was your brother; but I suppose he'll know you all right, and accept your references for my respectability. Going to write to him now?"

"Rather not. We will drop in on him and take him by surprise, and then we can loiter on the way if we like, and not rush across Europe by express. We will go quietly, and look out for adventures."

"All right; then you intend to walk, I suppose? That means no servants, of course."

"We won't make any cut-and-dried plan, but go as we choose, and I don't see why we shouldn't tramp it occasionally, when you feel up to it. I won't take Jameson, certainly, and I don't think you'll want your man. Let us take Harry Wright between us. He can turn his hand to most things, and he'll be useful if we are obliged to get horses. We may have to ride to Temeszy's place. I fancy there's no railway near it."

"I'm agreeable," said Cyril; "and we'll stay away until we yearn for home again, and feel able to say, 'England, with all thy faults (and you've a beastly lot of them), I love thee still.' We don't at present."

In this way the matter was settled, and a few days later the two brothers left Llandiarmid for London, where Caerleon did his best to make a satisfactory disposition of his rather complicated affairs, and Cyril went round to say good-bye to his lady friends. Cyril was a very popular young man in London society, where he had found a footing as soon as he left Eton. He had slipped out of sight for a short time as unpaid attaché in the British Embassy at Pavelsburg, but the Scythian winter proved too severe for him, and he was invalided home, to take up a pleasant existence about town, while assuring every one that he was only waiting until a suitable post should offer itself for his acceptance.

in some more genial clime. As a poverty-stricken younger son, he was free from the pursuit of the match-making mothers and daughters who had made Caerleon's life such a burden to him. No one wanted to marry him, and, fortunately for himself, he felt no particular desire to marry any one. The part he had chosen in the Human Comedy was that of the Laughing Philosopher, and he played it with complete satisfaction to himself and to his world. He was a universal favourite among the ladies, helping the elder ones to arrange their cotillons and organise their charity bazaars, while for the younger he designed costumes for fancy balls, and was always ready to suggest new ideas for any scheme of pleasure. With men he was not quite so popular. Those who did not know him well regarded him as entirely a ladies' man, while some few who had penetrated more deeply into his character were a little afraid of him, and half suspected him of hiding deep designs under a mask of frivolity. This was not the case, however. Cyril was fully conscious of his own powers of mind, but he had no scruple as to using them to smooth his path in society until some more important object should come in his way.

Among the many houses at which he felt compelled to declare his plans was Mrs Sadleir's, and he breathed a sigh of relief when he found himself approaching it at the end of an afternoon of polite lamentation and playful scolding on the subject of his madness in burying his social talents among unappreciative foreigners. Mrs Sadleir was too much at home with him to waste time in unnecessary *bardinage*. If she had anything to say, she was wont to come to the point at once, and this particular occasion proved to be no exception to the rule.

"And so you are going to Hungary, Cyril?" she said, as he came into the room, without offering him any conventional greeting. "Oh, don't accuse me of witchcraft. I have had Caerleon here already. He dropped in between visits to his lawyer and his tailor, I believe, and he struck me as not looking at all well, poor fellow! Now, I have only one remark to make. Has it occurred to you that Hungary and Thracia are not at all far apart?"

"No, indeed," said Cyril, with a start. "I never thought of it. And I'm certain it hasn't struck Caerleon either—that is, unless you have put it into his head."

"My dear Cyril," said Mrs Sadleir, severely, "I was not born yesterday. Your poor dear father called and gave me such a scolding last year for tempting Caerleon to throw his life away in Thracia that I vowed I would never speak to either of you on the subject again, and I haven't mentioned it to Caerleon. I merely wish to know whether you think there is any possibility that M. Drakovics's scheme may be carried out after all?"

"Well, I don't know," said Cyril, reflectively. "Caerleon is in rather an ugly temper just now, for him, and I shouldn't much wonder if he did anything foolish. The Governor is gone, you see, and it was only his expressed wish that kept him at home before."

"Yes, I see," returned Mrs Sadleir. "And what do you think of the matter, Cyril? On which side would your influence be thrown?"

"Well," said Cyril, "it seems to me that it wouldn't be bad fun to try the thing. I'm not up to larks much generally, but there's a good deal that's new in this one. I wouldn't go in for it myself on any account, but I shouldn't so much mind seeing Caerleon

through. It would certainly be a new sensation, one of the few still possible for most ordinary mortals in this worn-out old world, to find oneself a king's brother—a royalty, in fact. One hears of a few fellows who have been made kings in the Cannibal Islands, or Central Africa; but it's not often that one gets the chance of a properly organised European kingdom. It's not half a bad idea."

"Then I am to understand," said Mrs Sadleir, "that in case M. Drakovics should under any circumstances renew his offer of the crown (mind, I don't in the least say he will, for his patriotic feelings were very much wounded by Caerleon's refusal), your valuable advice and assistance would be cast on the side of the angels—that is, of the luckless Thracians?"

"Well," said Cyril again, "I think the angels would get it that time. I should never think of letting Caerleon go into a job of the kind by himself; but really and truly I don't believe he would come to such awful smash if I was there to back him up. I should make it my business to play him off against Drakovics. It isn't healthy for that old man to get his own way to the extent he does. I am morally certain that he would very soon begin to presume if he had only Caerleon to deal with."

"M. Drakovics ought to be very much obliged to you. I almost think it is my duty to warn him of your intentions. You know that I correspond with him occasionally? But really, Cyril, I scarcely think that it would be possible for you and Caerleon to reign together in the affectionate way you suggest, like the two kings of Barataria."

"Or the Heavenly Twins," said Cyril. "No, of course I mean the Siamese Twins. I'm afraid the

kingdom would hardly support the double honours. No, Mrs. Sadleir, my ambition is a much higher one. I mean to be the power behind the throne."

"But that is M. Drakovics's destined place," objected Mrs. Sadleir.

"Then I shall be the man behind Drakovics," said Cyril, calmly.

"I don't know that I am justified in letting a firebrand like you loose upon Thracia," said Mrs. Sadleir; "but M. Drakovics knows something about your family, and if he chooses to take Caerleon with such an encumbrance, it will be his own doing. You don't know M. Drakovics, do you, Cyril? Well, I will give you a letter of introduction to him if you like—only to be delivered if you visit Thracia, of course. When you have had a little time in Hungary, you will be able to judge better of Caerleon's state of mind, and to see whether he is inclined to give the kingdom a trial. If so, extend your travels into Thracia, and deliver the letter. Here it is. I have been writing it this afternoon."

"Rather previous, surely?" asked Cyril, with uplifted eyebrows; but he took the letter readily enough, putting it into his safest pocket, and it was packed carefully among his most treasured possessions when he and his brother started on their journey, an event which was announced to the world in the stereotyped terms by the 'Morning Post':—

"The Marquis of Caerleon and Lord Cyril Mortimer left England yesterday afternoon for the Continent, with the intention of undertaking an extended tour in Eastern Europe."

Thanks to Caerleon's foresight in not sending word to his friend of their intended visit to Hungary, the

tour was carried on in a very leisurely fashion indeed, and the brothers lounged through Europe, to use Cyril's phrase, by unfrequented routes, spending now a day and now a week in old half-deserted towns, left high and dry by the stream of modern progress. There was nothing very inspiriting in such travelling to men who were neither antiquarians nor photographic maniacs; but Caerleon had a vague idea that he was improving his mind by visiting the scenes made famous by old German history, while Cyril was as well content to put in his time on the Continent in this way as in another. The person who suffered most was Wright, the groom, who found himself debarred in most places from communion with his kind owing to his ignorance of the language, and he rejoiced unfeignedly when the course of his masters' wanderings brought them at last to Janoszwar, the town that lay nearest to Count Gyula Temeszy's castle.

Janoszwar was reached late one evening, and the travellers looked about them in some dismay as they drove to the hotel which had been recommended to them by some tourists they had met at Szegedin as the only one at which it was possible for English people to stay. The town was very small, and almost incredibly dirty, while, to put the finishing touch to their discomfiture, they found on arriving that they could not be received at the hotel. Its accommodation was extremely limited at the best of times, and at present all the rooms were in the occupation of the family of a Scythian officer of high rank, who was visiting the town for the sake of the mineral springs in its neighbourhood. This the landlord, a Hungarian who had spent several years in America, explained volubly and sorrowfully, and invited his intending

guests to depart at once. But Cyril was very tired, and Caerleon, fearing that he might be going to fall ill again, tried to parley, pointing out that it was impossible for them to drive on eighteen miles farther to the Château Temeszy that night, and offering double the usual prices for the necessary accommodation. Still the landlord remained firm (though with deepening regret, as recognising that he had to deal with wealthy English *milords*), declaring that the Herr Oberst had assured him he would leave instantly if any other guests were admitted into the hotel. There seemed to be nothing to do but to seek some other resting-place, and Caerleon was just returning to the carriage in despair, when a white-haired man came slowly down the outer staircase of the inn, leaning heavily on a stick.

"Here is the gracious Herr Oberst himself!" said the landlord; and Cyril, who had been acting as his brother's interpreter for the worthy man's Hungarian German and even less intelligible English, prepared to address the new-comer in Scythian, but this proved unnecessary.

"Sure I thought I heard English voices," said the Herr Oberst, "and it struck me that the landlord might be following too rigorously the orders I gave um. The fact is, gentlemen, that most of the people rich enough to travel in these parts are Austrian Jews, and me wife has a great objection to Jews, so that the only way I could get her here was by engaging to keep out of their reach. But I can assure you that I had no desire to inconvenience English travellers—You are English, gentlemen?"

"We are," said Caerleon. "I am Lord Caerleon, and this is my brother."

"I am much honoured, me lord," said the Herr Oberst, bowing deeply. "Allow me to introduce myself. Me name is O'Malachy—The O'Malachy, at your servus, the representativ of the ancient kings of Leitrum,—and I will be much displeased if you go a step farther to-night. Sure me son has not yet arrived, and what does me daughter want with two rooms? We'll just tell some of the landlord's fellers to bundle our traps out of the rooms, and you will have them."

"Pray don't disturb Miss O'Malachy," entreated Caerleon in consternation. "I could not think of turning a lady out of her room. If you would be so kind as to allow my brother to occupy the room your son is not using, my servant and I will find quarters elsewhere."

"Not a bit of ut!" cried the O'Malachy. "Would I turn you away when there are empty rooms waiting for you? Come, young gentleman," turning to Cyril, "just make your brother understand that if he won't stay he'll oblige us all to turn out and leave the place free for um. Is not a whole hotel big enough for two families?"

"You are very kind," began Caerleon. But the O'Malachy was in full retreat up the stairs again. At the top he turned and paused for a moment, the lamp-light shining on his bronzed face and white moustache and imperial.

"A good night to you!" he called out. "I'll be pleased to resoom your acquaintance in the morning, me lord. Now, you don't leave this hotel—at least, it'll be the worse for ut if you do!"

After this hospitable intimation, the travellers held back no longer, and speedily found themselves established in most comfortable quarters, for the landlord was

delighted not to be compelled to turn away such promising guests from his door. Nothing was too good for them, and they went to bed well content, after commissioning the host to procure horses in the morning for their intended ride to Château Temeszy.

In the morning, then, they started on this last stage of their journey, leaving Wright at the hotel with the luggage until it could be sent for, and bidding a grateful farewell to the O'Malachy, who was smoking a wonderful cigar on the balcony over the door. The ride was a long one, and the roads very bad, but Caerleon had brought a map of the district in his pocket, and with its aid they succeeded in finding their way. But when they reached the castle disappointment awaited them. Everything was shut up, and the only person in authority was an aged steward, who informed them that Count Temeszy Gyula (putting the surname first in true Hungarian fashion) was in Paris, and the rest of the family at Vienna. The English gentlemen might inspect the castle and the stables while a meal was being prepared for them, the best possible at such short notice, but the old man could not venture to invite them to take up their quarters in the house without instructions from his master. It was also possible that the Count's foresters might organise a wolf-hunt one day for the strangers' benefit, but it would still be best for them to return to Janoszwar until Count Gyula could be communicated with.

"I didn't know that we were such suspicious-looking characters," grumbled Cyril after lunch, as they mounted their horses to retrace their weary way.

"And we shall have to quarter ourselves upon the O'Malachy again," responded Caerleon. "That's what I hate. It looks such a shabby thing to do."

But when they reached the hotel they found their rooms ready, and the landlord and Wright expecting them.

"The old gentleman up-stairs tell us to look out for you, my lord," said the latter to his master. "'E said as you'd most likely be comin' back about this time."

"Did the O'Malachy know that Temeszy was away when we started?" asked Caerleon of Cyril as they sat at dinner.

"Don't know," said Cyril. "Perhaps he thought you looked as though a ride would do you good. He seems a decent enough old chap, anyhow. His wife is a Scythian lady, Wright tells me."

"Oh, by the bye, that reminds me," said Caerleon; "we must call to-morrow. I'll tell Wright to hunt up our visiting-cards, and we'll do the thing in style."

But Caerleon and his brother were not destined to make the acquaintance of the O'Malachy's family in the orthodox fashion they had contemplated, for in the morning, as they breakfasted, they heard excited voices outside their door. They had just decided that it would not do to pay their call until the afternoon, and that the morning might profitably be spent in climbing one of the mountains which surrounded the little town, and Cyril, who was not devoid of curiosity, thought that the present would be a good opportunity of consulting the landlord as to the best way to take. Opening the door, therefore, he stepped out casually, to find the landlord, his wife, and the servants engaged in an animated colloquy with a very handsome lady in an elaborate dressing-gown, who was standing on the outer stair and talking French and German alternately.

"You tell me that she is gone?" she was say-

ing. "But no! I say it is impossible. She would be terrified."

"There is no danger, madame," suggested the landlord, soothingly; "and no doubt the gracious young lady knows this."

"No danger!" cried madame, vivaciously. "When there may at this very moment be wolves, brigands, avalanches, menacing my child? What though she does think she is safe? Her very confidence may be her greatest danger. She must be followed—rescued—immediately."

"I assure you, madame, that mademoiselle is perfectly safe," repeated the landlord. Madame wrung her hands.

"My excellent man, how can you understand a mother's feelings? I tell you my daughter must be rescued. If there is no one else, I will go myself, although I have never walked a mile in my life, and the Herr Oberst is quite helpless with his gout."

"It is unnecessary for madame to incommoder herself," said the landlord, sulkily. "If she insists upon it, two of the men shall go, although it is absolutely impossible to spare them from the farm."

"Naturally I insist upon it," returned madame. "What is your farm to me? The men shall be paid. Send them off at once. If only there was some friend near who might help us!"

"Pardon me, madame," said Caerleon, coming forward. He had been listening in bewilderment to the colloquy over Cyril's shoulder, and picking up snatches of what was said. "I think I have the honour of addressing Madame O'Malachy? Can my brother and I be of any assistance to you?"

"My dear sir," said madame, with a charming smile,

"I am ashamed to trouble you, but you would confer the greatest possible favour on my husband and myself if you would be so good as to help us. My daughter is a headstrong child, and she has started off early this morning to visit the sick daughter of a huntsman in the mountains. To ask you to give up your own concerns on account of the whim of a foolish girl is too bad, and yet I have no one else to send."

"We shall be delighted if we can be of any use," said Caerleon. "Do I understand that you would like us to meet Mademoiselle O'Malachy and bring her home? We were intending to spend the morning in the mountains, so that we shall not even need to change our plans."

"Monsieur is too good," returned Madame O'Malachy. "I am desolated to be obliged to incommod him in this way, but my daughter has always lived in the country with her godmother, and knows nothing of the dangers which beset a young girl alone."

"Still, madame," put in Cyril, "one can have nothing but admiration for the philanthropic instinct which has prompted mademoiselle to set out by herself to relieve a sick girl."

"You are too amiable, monsieur," said madame. "My daughter is *dévote*, what you call 'religious,' and this characteristic makes a great deal of trouble for herself and for other people. But behold me only half-dressed!" and madame became suddenly aware that her abundant dark hair, scarcely yet tinged with grey, was coiled negligently in a loose knot on her neck; "pardon me, gentlemen, and remember my anxiety. Pray scold my daughter well when you find her. *Au revoir!*" and she retreated up-stairs.

"Pleasant woman, Madame O'Malachy," Caerleon

remarked to Cyril when they had obtained directions from the landlord as to the exact situation of the huntsman's cottage, and had started on their walk, "but I can't quite make her out."

"Can't you?" said Cyril. "I can. I've met too many of her before."

"She seemed so very anxious and excited," went on Caerleon, pursuing his own train of thought, "and yet she doesn't appear to care much for her daughter."

"Not a scrap!" said Cyril, emphatically. "Rather hates her than otherwise, I should say, from her tone. Fact is, either she particularly wants the hotel to herself to-day, or she wishes to throw one of us, presumably you, into the society of the young lady. Well, forewarned is forearmed."

"But it couldn't have been all humbug. She wouldn't have shown up in that costume if she hadn't been really anxious."

"That costume!" said Cyril. "I'm as sure as that I'm here that every hair of that coil was arranged with an eye to its effect on us."

"But she came down in a dressing-gown."

"Yes, but what kind of dressing-gown? When a Scythian lady, and still more a Sarmatian,—and there's a good deal more of the Sarmatian than the Scythian about our fair friend,—shows up in a dressing-gown, you may be pretty sure that it's a court-dress rather differently made. Madame knows how to dress her part to the letter."

Caerleon only grunted in answer to this, and they went on in silence for some time. The path was steep, and Cyril found that climbing took all the breath he had to spare.

"How much farther now to the top?" he asked at

last, when they reached a sheltered nook in the hillside where a few pine-trees nestled.

"A good two miles yet," said Caerleon, looking back on the way they had come.

"Then I give in," said Cyril, resolutely, sitting down on a rock. "I'm about done, and I shall leave the further chase of this young person to you. Ten to one but she'll come down some other way when you are gone on to the hut, and I shall get hold of her first and give her a good lecture."

"Lecture a strange girl?"

"Rather! I shall say, 'My young friend, to try and thrust your schoolmistress's views on papa and mamma is not religion, but self-will, and to emphasise them by running off like this is not heroic, but bad-tempered.'"

"All right; I wish you luck. If mademoiselle has a tongue anything like her mamma's, you will be pretty well pulverised by the time I come back. Well, I'm off. See you again in an hour."

CHAPTER III.

“IF THOU WERT KIND AS THOU ART FAIR——”

LEAVING his brother to contemplate the beauties of nature under the shade of the pines, Caerleon walked on, finding his progress much more rapid than it had been when Cyril was his companion, and arrived before very long at a point from which he was able to descry the huntsman's cottage, built under the shelter of a towering crag. Pausing for a moment to determine which of two paths now before him would be more likely to lead him directly towards it, he heard footsteps above him, and presently a lady came in sight round a turning in the right-hand path. Tall and slight, she wore a plain tweed dress and felt hat, and the trim neatness of her appearance struck Caerleon as most refreshing after the alternate dowdiness and magnificence of many of the Austrian belles he had come across. It did not occur to him at first that this stately lady could be the hoydenish little Scythian schoolgirl of whom he was in search, but presently it struck him as unlikely that two young ladies would be wandering alone in the mountains on the same day, and he advanced to meet the girl.

"Excuse me," he said, taking off his cap, "but have I the honour of speaking to Mdlle. O'Malachy?"

"I am Nadia O'Malachy," she replied, looking at him with an expression in which he read surprise not wholly unmixed with resentment. He noticed that her eyes were large and grey, and that her wavy dark hair grew low on her brow. She spoke English readily, but with a slight foreign accent.

"I must ask you to forgive me for stopping you in this way," said Caerleon, wishing to disarm her evident suspicion, "but the fact is that Madame O'Malachy was very anxious about you, and I promised to see you safely back to the hotel."

"My mother sent you after me?" she said quickly. "It was quite unnecessary. Pray continue your walk."

"The object of my walk is achieved," said Caerleon. "I have only to return."

"I have told you," said the girl, with angry dignity, "that I do not desire your company."

Caerleon laughed inwardly. The walk seemed to promise some amusement. "And I regret, mademoiselle," he said, "that having promised to see you home, I must do it. I will walk behind you, if you prefer it."

"Oh no," said Mdlle. O'Malachy, pointing to the path beside her with an imperious gesture, "I do not wish to insult you. You consider yourself a gentleman. I took you for one."

She walked on by his side, apparently expecting a retort, but he maintained a resolute silence, although secretly convulsed by the contrast between the intention she expressed and the words which followed it. Suddenly, to his surprise, she turned to him.

"I beg your pardon. I ought not to have said that. I was wrong."

"Pray don't apologise," said Caerleon. "I am here only as your mother's messenger, and I quite understand that you find my presence disagreeable, and that I can't expect you to consider my feelings."

"I do not consider them," she retorted. "I apologised because it was right to do it when I had been rude."

"As a punishment to yourself?" asked Caerleon, much amused.

"Certainly not," she answered. "As a means of self-discipline."

"I see—and a punishment to me?"

"By no means. Why should I punish you? What you do has no interest for me. Oh, I beg your pardon. That was rude again."

"Not at all. But I am interested in your self-disciplinary system. Do you mind explaining it a little more fully? I think I ought to hear something about it, you know, since I have to suffer from it."

"Now she's going to flare up again," he thought, as his companion turned and glared at him, but the anger faded out of her eyes as he looked at her in calm expectancy.

"It is a just rebuke," she said, in a low voice. "I will tell you, although I do not care to speak of myself, but it will be a good punishment for me, as you say. My godmother, with whom I have always lived until lately, used to encourage me to self-denial when I was a child, saying that one could never rise to the height of a great renunciation unless one trained oneself for it by means of constant smaller ones. As I grew older, the principle seemed to me so excellent that I have followed it in other things.—When you were little, did you never hold your hand in the flame of the candle to try and find out whether you could be a martyr?"

"No," said Caerleon; "I have often done it, but I am afraid it was because I was told not to."

"Well, I have done it—often. And so with other things. I discovered in myself a strong tendency to insincerity, and fearing to yield to it, I made it a duty never to let politeness or the desire to please keep me from saying what I thought. How dreadful it would be to fail in truthfulness at some great crisis on account of a long course of petty hypocrisies! But I found that this made me appear rude, and I am very proud, and did not like to confess myself in the wrong. So here was another opportunity for self-discipline, and I resolved to let nothing prevent me from instantly asking pardon of any one I had offended in this way."

"I see—without regard to that person's feelings. And may I ask whether Madame—your godmother—pursues the same system?"

"My godmother is Princess Soudaroff. No; she does not need it, she is too good. Her life is given up to working among the poor. Her house is an asylum for the wretched. She loves every one, is kind to every one."

"And she has impressed her views upon you, has she? Did I understand you to say that she brought you up?"

"Yes; she pitied the life I led with my parents, and she adopted me as her own. She gave me everything I could need, and provided excellent teachers for me; but, best of all, she allowed me to help her in her work. Sometimes we lived at her country house, and worked among the peasants, and sometimes in Pavelsburg, and then our work lay among the poorest of the poor. Oh, what a life it was! She cares for body and soul alike. The hospitals and prisons are visited, Bible-

classes, sewing-classes held ; drunkards reached, young girls away from home befriended and taken care of. To be in trouble or in loneliness—that gives you claim enough upon my Princess."

"I didn't know that you went in for all this kind of thing in Scythia," said Caerleon. "It's not quite one's idea of the Greek Church, somehow."

"But we are Evangelicals; we are separated," said the girl, eagerly. "They say we are heretics,—Non-conformists, I think you call it in England,—and they persecute us. My godmother has often been in danger of exile, but something has always happened to save her. She has no fear at all."

"Only for you, perhaps. I suppose the reason you are here is that she sent you away when danger threatened. You didn't leave her, I am sure."

"Not of my own free will, never! My mother sent for me; but not on account of any danger. She gave me up willingly enough when I was of no use to her, but now she thinks that I am old enough to be of assistance. Assistance to her!" .

"I daresay it is better for you, after all, than your life with Princess Soudaroff," said Caerleon, judicially. "We can't always have what we like, you know, and it doesn't look well for a girl to be unable to get on with her mother."

"How dare you say that?" she cried, turning upon him again. "What do you know of my circumstances? Do you think I have not tried, longed, *agonised* to honour my father and mother? but I will not help them in their work. Don't talk to me of the look of things until you know something about them. Oh, I beg——"

"Excuse me," said Caerleon, quickly, "but if you

have to apologise to me again, do you mind turning your head away, and doing it in a whisper? The effect on yourself would be the same, and it would spare my feelings."

"You are a scoffer!" said Mdlle. O'Malachy, sharply.

"I hope not; but I am afraid that your apologies will get on my nerves."

"Your nerves?" she looked him up and down, and then laughed. "You don't suffer from nerves?"

"You don't know how wearing it is to be always looking out for apologies—and getting them."

"But why should it affect your nerves? You are English, you do not drink absinthe?" She was still looking him over in the light of a curious medical problem, and her tone was full of interest.

"I hope you don't intend to catechise me upon my private vices," said Caerleon, hastily. "What I said was only in joke. I don't know what nerves are."

"A joke?" Evidently it had not occurred to her that any one could take such a liberty on such short acquaintance. "But I do not even know your name, sir."

"And is it necessary to know a man's name before he may make a joke in conversation with you?" asked Caerleon, laughing, but she did not hear him.

"I know you must be one of the English noblemen who are staying in the hotel, and you cannot be the brother—he is small and delicate, my father said so. You are, then, the pretender?"

"The pretender?" asked Caerleon in astonishment.

"I beg your pardon—I should have remembered that the word has a worse meaning in English than in French. The aspirant, I should say—the aspirant to the throne of Thracia?"

"Well, I was, a year ago; or rather the throne of Thracia aspired to me. I refused it, you know."

"I remember; I was sorry. But you are going to accept it now?"

"Now? I don't know what you mean. I haven't a thought of it."

"Then why are you here?"

"Here? in Hungary? To visit my friend, Count Temeszy."

"But you are on your way to Thracia?"

"I assure you I am not. What can have put it into your head?"

"Every one thinks so. My parents quite believe it—and so do others."

"Then they are mistaken, that's all."

"But why do you stay here, since Count Temeszy is away? You leave soon?"

"Not that I know of. Why should we?"

"Sir," her voice was very earnest, "will you be angry if I give you a warning? If there is no special reason to keep you here, do not remain. My father is not—is not a good friend for young men."

"A card-sharper, of course!" was the thought that darted through Caerleon's mind. "It's good of her to tell me, poor girl!" Aloud he added, "Thank you for your warning, mademoiselle. Perhaps you would be so kind as to mention to your father that I don't carry the revenues of Thracia about with me."

"You won't understand," cried the girl, passionately; "it is nothing about money. Consider what political disturbances your acceptance of the crown might bring about, and that there are those who will suspect you of desiring to provoke them so long as you remain in this part of Europe, however innocent your motives may be."

I remember that when the crown was offered to you last year, the affair was much discussed in our circle. I myself heard Count Wratisloff say in my godmother's drawing-room, 'Here is the peace of Europe hanging upon the caprice of a boy!'"

"I am much obliged to him," said Caerleon, grimly.

"Now I have offended you again. I am sorry. Count Wratisloff is a man who speaks a little emphatically sometimes, but he had no intention of being unkind. He prayed for you himself at our prayer-meeting the next day."

"Very kind of him, I'm sure. I suppose he prayed that I might refuse the crown?"

"Oh no. How could he pretend to regulate the course of public affairs? If the time is come for a great European war, who can prevent it? He prayed that all might happen for the best."

"Then you and your circle are fatalists, mademoiselle?"

"Surely not. 'What will be, will be'—that is what the fatalists say, is it not?" she looked at him inquiringly. "But what we say is, 'What will be, must be for the best.'"

"But why pray about it, then?" asked Caerleon, interested by this frank confession of faith.

"That we may be brought to believe that it is so when we cannot see it," she answered, in a low voice; and although Caerleon would willingly have pursued the subject, a turn in the path here brought them in sight of Cyril, and there was no further opportunity for private conversation. During the rest of the way home they spoke chiefly of temperance work, Mdlle. O'Malachy recounting incidents from her experience among Princess Soudaroff's *protégés*, and Caerleon

replying with reminiscences of the various abortive attempts at restrictive legislation which he had supported in his House of Commons days, while Cyril listened and smiled with lofty contempt.

"Here we are," he said at last, with undisguised relief, "and here is your father coming to meet us, mademoiselle."

"Naughty girl!" cried the O'Malachy, shaking his fist playfully at his daughter. "I hope you've given trouble enough to us and to these gentlemen? There's your mother waiting for you on the balcony. Go and settle up with her yourself. Me lord, I can't tell you how grateful I am to you and to Lord Cyrul for your goodnuss to-day. Me wife is very nervous, but you have been most kind in relieving her anxiety. May I hope that you will give us the pleasure of your company at dinner this evening? Madame O'Malachy will like to thank you herself."

"You are very kind," said Caerleon. "We were hoping to call this afternoon——"

"Call!" cried the O'Malachy in high contempt. "Would you talk about calling in this wildernuss? Come to-night, and we'll be delightud to see you."

The invitation was accepted with suitable gratitude, and the O'Malachy returned to his wife and daughter, while Caerleon and Cyril sought their own quarters. Lunch was rather a silent ceremony, for Caerleon felt an unaccountable aversion to detailing to his brother his conversation with Nadia O'Malachy.

"Not going out again, surely?" said Cyril, when the meal was over, and Caerleon took up his cap from the window-seat.

"I want a smoke."

"Well, there are no ladies here, thank goodness! Sit down and smoke like a reasonable human being."

"No, I want a walk."

"I should have thought you had had walking enough for one day," grumbled Cyril, but Caerleon was already outside, and he was obliged to address the remainder of his complaint to his cigar. "He walks with her all morning, does he? and then goes out again to think about her? I ought to have foreseen this. That's the drawback of the kind of life we've been leading for a man of Caerleon's stamp. He's scarcely spoken to a lady since the Governor died, and now the first decent-looking girl he meets bowls him over at once. What a blessing it is that I'm not susceptible!"

Caerleon's walk lasted for over two hours, and Cyril, with a telegram in his hand, was awaiting him impatiently when he returned.

"Back at last!" he said. "Do see what this is. It may be to summon us home about something, or it may be from Temeszy."

"It is from Temeszy," said Caerleon, opening it. "The steward must have telegraphed to him yesterday as soon as we were gone. He has business in Paris which will keep him there for more than a month, but he wants us to take up our quarters at the castle, ride his horses, hunt his wolves, or whatever else in the way of game there may be about, and so on—in fact, use the house as if it was our own."

"Well, what do you think?" asked Cyril.

"If you ask me," said Caerleon, slowly, "I think that we might as well have stayed at Llandiarmid as bury ourselves out there without Temeszy or any one to speak to."

"I see," said Cyril. "You mean to stay on here for the present, then?"

"Yes, I think we might."

"But you forget that Mr or M. O'Malachy is coming back. What is one to call a fellow who has an Irish father and a Sarmatian mother, and has been brought up abroad? But anyhow, he is coming, and we have got his room."

"I forgot that," said Caerleon, rather crestfallen. "We must find out to-night when he is expected. There's no need to leave until he comes."

Once more Cyril drew dark inferences from his brother's words, but he made no remark, and at the appointed time they presented themselves in Madame O'Malachy's *salon*, where a most cordial welcome awaited them. They were the only guests, and it fell naturally to Caerleon to escort his hostess to the table and to sit beside her, a privilege for which he was not as grateful as he ought to have been, for he could hear Cyril and Nadia wrangling busily throughout the meal. Guessing that his brother was treating Mdlle. O'Malachy to a little *fin de siècle* philosophy, he had no difficulty in imagining the light in which it would strike her, and his anxiety to hear what she was saying in reply distracted his attention a little from her mother, who conversed vivaciously in French, addressing him as "*mon cher marquis*" in a way that reminded him vaguely of the Molière he had read when at school.

"I am longing that you should know my son," she observed at last. "He is of the same age as your brother, and I have a presentiment that they will be friends. Louis is a true enthusiast, and it is this trait in his character that has caused us no small anxiety. My husband has perhaps told you that until a short time ago the unfortunate boy was an officer in the Scythian army. Would you believe that he

has resigned his post in order to join the Thracian revolutionists?"

"Indeed?" said Caerleon, much interested; "and has he joined them yet?"

"No, but he intends to do so as soon as possible. Imagine his throwing away all his prospects like this! It is madness."

"Come now, Barbara," put in the O'Malachy from his end of the table. "Louie is a very decent feller, and he may make his way yet. You wouldn't believe that I meself began life as a leader in the Sarmatian insurrection, would you?" he asked, turning to the young men with an air of extreme innocence.

"No, indeed," said Caerleon, dimly conscious that Cyril started, and pursed up his lips as though to whistle.

"It's true, then. When I left Ireland as a young man, after a little difficulty with the Government connectud with the troubles of '48, I took, though it is not I should say ut, a prominent part in the Sarmatian affair, and yet here I am now, a colonel in the Scythian army. I learned wisdom, you see. The Scythians were not so bad as I had thought them, and the Sarmatians were a good deal worse, and so ut happened that I changed sides, perhaps with a little persuasion of another kind addud on," and he glanced waggishly at his wife, who laughed rather nervously, and remarked that the candles were burning low.

"But have you never visited England since 1848?" asked Caerleon. "Surely there can be no danger of your being arrested now? I hope I may have the pleasure of welcoming you at Llandiarmid yet."

"Yes," said Cyril, "if you began as a Sarmatian

revolutionist and end as a Scythian officer, we may hope to see you in a comfortable berth in the Constabulary yet, O'Malachy."

"Ah, but there's another businuss since '48," said the O'Malachy. "You know Balster, the feller that was made Irush Secretary two or three years ago? When I heard he had got the Irush Offus, I sent um a present of a box of cigars, the brand I always smoke meself—he had admired them greatly when I met um at Ludwigsbad some time before. Well, would you believe ut? Sure 'twas a mighty queer piece of work—the police opened the box when ut got to Doblun, and they found dynamite in ut. So then they accused me of trying to blow the man up, and I daren't set foot in me native land. I was sorry, of course; but how was ut me fault?"

"Do you mean to imply," asked Caerleon, "that the police took the cigars out and put dynamite instead of them?"

"All I can say," replied the O'Malachy, spreading out his hands with a deprecatory gesture, "is that I sent cigars, and that the police fellers found an infernal machine. You must make what you can of ut."

"Oh, don't harp on the subject, Caerleon," put in Cyril, seeing that his brother was not satisfied. "Can't you see that it's very naturally disagreeable to the O'Malachy? When do you expect your son, O'Malachy?"

"In two or three days, Lord Cyril. I am greatly pleased that he will be so fortunate as to meet you here."

"Oh, but we shan't be here," said Caerleon, seizing his opportunity. "We must not forget that we are

trespassing on your kindness all the time we occupy these rooms. We will clear out to-morrow, if you like."

"That you won't," returned the O'Malachy. "Why, when I was hearing in the town yesterday that your friend was in Parrus, and knew that you would be wanting to come back here, I went straight to the landlord, and got um to clear out another room for Louie, without any fuss at all. So now the place is plenty big for both of us, and I will think that you are offended with us if you turn out before you have seen all you want of the neighbourhood."

"Since you are so kind," said Caerleon, "we will certainly stay on for the present." Here a frown from Cyril reached him, and an almost imperceptible "Don't!" and he added rather lamely, "That is, if you are quite sure we are not inconveniencing you—or Miss O'Malachy."

"My dear marquis," said Madame O'Malachy, "let me assure you that your society is already doing my husband far more good than the waters here. As for my daughter, how should you inconvenience her?"

"Oh no; why should I need two rooms?" asked Nadia, gloomily, and Caerleon could get nothing but monosyllables from her during the remainder of the evening. When the guests were gone, however, she turned to her parents as she was leaving the room.

"You may be interested to know," she said in her clear hard voice, "that Lord Caerleon has no intention of going to Thracia, nor of accepting the Thracian crown. I am not in the habit of helping you in your work, but I thought that this piece of news might possibly lead you to alter your plans a little."

"Many thanks, my daughter," said Madame O'Mal-

achy, while her husband laughed softly. "In what way are our plans to be changed?"

"Surely you can leave Lord Caerleon and his brother alone, now that you know this, and not seek to involve them in any danger?"

"Mademoiselle," said the O'Malachy, rising and standing with his back to the stove, "may I remind you of one small fact? We have not, as you remark, the honour of your assistance, and I regret to say that this necessarily deprives you of any pleasure you might derive from sharing our confidence. Whatever plans your mother and I may have in view, we do not feel inclined to risk their reaching Lord Caerleon by communicating them to you."

Nadia's face grew crimson, but she threw her head back proudly as she bade her parents good-night and left the room.

"There is a little fool for you!" said Madame O'Malachy with lazy contempt.

"What did you mean by making signs to me at dinner?" asked Caerleon of Cyril, when they were alone together in his room.

"Any one with ordinary common-sense would have seen that I meant you not to accept the O'Malachy's offer, but to go on at once, away from here."

"But why in the world? You said nothing of this before."

"Because I did not know who he was, but at dinner it suddenly flashed upon me that he was the hero of a story which I heard when I was in Pavelsburg. Old Dostelsky, who helped in putting down the Sarmatian rebellion, told it to two or three of us in the smoking-room one night."

"Something spicy, I suppose? Come, let us hear it."

"Well, it seems that the O'Malachy was, as he said, one of the Sarmatian leaders, and he gave the Scythians so much trouble that they were ready to go any lengths to get rid of him. They tried fair means and they tried foul—open attacks, and bribes, and attempted assassination, but it was all no good. At last—I don't know whether it was a lucky guess, or whether something showed them his weak point—they thought of working upon his susceptibilities. They had a decoy handy, Mdlle. Barbara Platovska, a young Sarmatian lady, brought up in Paris and trained in Scythia. She had done a good deal of work for them already, and she was as plucky and as wily as she was beautiful, so that she was a valuable instrument. Well, they sent her off with a free hand, and a pardon for O'Malachy, signed by the Emperor, in her pocket, together with a promise of employment for him in the Scythian army. Mdlle. Barbara lays her plans, and presently, travelling by night through a forest where the rebels had one of their camps, she falls into their hands. There was some talk of shooting her at once, for her face was unmistakable, and they all knew what harm she had done to their cause; but she singled out O'Malachy, and threw herself at his feet and demanded his protection. You wouldn't find many Irishmen who would refuse to help a pretty woman in such a plight, and O'Malachy pulled her behind him, and told the rest to come on. They nearly got to blows, but at last they agreed to give the girl some form of trial, and they carried her off to their headquarters. Naturally O'Malachy kept close to her on the way, and she used her opportunity so well that before the journey was over he was head and ears in love with her. He soon

discovered that the rest were determined to kill her, and the very first night that he had the chance he helped her to escape from the ruined tower in which she was imprisoned, and escorted her back to her friends. Up to that time he fully meant to go back and give himself up to his comrades, but now was Mdlle. Barbara's chance. She never let him alone on that journey, until she had got him to promise to come in with her and surrender. He must have been pretty sick of the Sar-matians altogether—they were rather a shady lot, always quarrelling and fighting among themselves—and there was nothing to be made out of their job, and he was in love as well, and he thought she loved him, so he consented. He got his pardon and his post in the Scythian army, and he meant to get Mdlle. Barbara. But when he went to claim her she met him as she had done the other men she had betrayed, turned her back on him and told him that no traitor should ever be her husband. But she had tried that trick once too often. He had her against the wall with a revolver to her head in an instant, and then and there he made her promise to marry him. And that wasn't all, either. He took her to the table, still with the revolver pointed at her, and made her write out and sign an account of the scene. Then he let her go, but she married him the next week. You see he could have ruined her with that paper. If it had once come to her employers' ears that she had lost her nerve, and yielded to threats, they would never have made use of her again. Perhaps, too, the O'Malachy's style of wooing pleased her, or she may have had a soft place for him in her heart all along. At any rate, they married, and went into partnership, and you see what a happy couple they are."

"But how did the story get about?" asked Caerleon. "Surely it was to the interest of both of them to keep it quiet."

"Oh, the O'Malachy let it out one evening when he had been dining—told it as rather a fine thing, I believe."

"The old beast! to go and give his wife away like that," remarked Caerleon, with righteous indignation.

"Well, after all, she doesn't show up so very much worse than he does in the matter," said Cyril. "They are rather a well-matched pair. You know what their present manner of life is?"

"Oh yes, I know. Card-sharpening."

Cyril stared. "Not unless you are speaking in parables, and alluding to political cards. They are spies of the Scythian Government, *agents provocateurs*, and so on. The O'Malachy is supposed to be travelling for his health, a pursuit which enables him to be pretty constantly on the move, and turn up just where his presence is required. Oh, he's a fine old fellow! Wasn't that rich about Balster and the infernal machine? It was an awful sell for him, though. Sorry! of course he was sorry—that Balster didn't open it himself, and get blown up. That's one of his little ways of employing his leisure hours, and the whole family are really otherwise engaged than in health-seeking, very much so."

"Not all of them. Miss O'Malachy is not."

"Well, you certainly know more about her than I do, so I can't say. You have a queer taste in fathers-in-law, though."

"Don't talk rot," said Caerleon, indignantly. "I won't hear the girl slandered, but I can't even make out whether I like her or not. She says the most

appalling things in the coolest voice, and then apologises."

"Well," said Cyril, getting near the door, "when a man goes out to think about a girl, and wastes two hours of his valuable time in trying to decide whether he likes her or not, and then comes back without having found out, it looks as though he was pretty far gone already." And Cyril quitted the room in a hurry, dexterously avoiding the boot which Caerleon hurled at him.

CHAPTER IV.

A CANDID FRIENDSHIP.

IN the morning no reference was made to the conversation of the evening before on the part either of Caerleon or of Cyril, although the latter found an ominous confirmation of his suspicions in the fact that his brother did not offer to change his plans in any way as a consequence of what had been said.

"He must really be smitten with the girl," argued Cyril, mentally, "for if he wasn't, he would take fright at the hints I gave him, and want to part company with these people at once. Well, it's his own look-out. He ought to marry, and it's very evident that he'll marry whom he likes. This girl is not bad-looking, and it's a strong point in her favour that the O'Malachy daren't set foot on English ground. A decent veil can be drawn over his existence so long as he keeps out of the way. At any rate, it's not my business to make a fuss, and if I did, Caerleon would probably go and propose at once. I'm glad I said what I did, for now he knows what he's about. He can't say that he's been let in for anything blindfold, but I mean to be satisfied with that."

Having decided on adopting the attitude of benevolent

neutrality, Cyril accompanied his brother without a murmur to the post-office, and the telegram refusing Count Temeszy's invitation was duly despatched. Returning towards the inn, they took their way through the Kurgarten, a desolate piece of ground adorned with a few straggling bushes and a good many dilapidated plaster statues, and here they found the O'Malachy family, occupying three of the paintless and rickety chairs arranged in a circle round the kiosk in which the waters of the medicinal spring were dispensed by an unattractive Hebe. The O'Malachy was sipping his morning tumbler of greenish and muddy-looking fluid with the air of a martyr, while his wife, in the most coquettish of Parisian morning costumes and hats, was communicating to her daughter her impressions of the few other health-seekers who patronised the Janoszwar waters, the majority of whom were the Hungarian Jewesses she regarded with such strong aversion. Nadia sat bolt upright beside her, silent and rebellious, her face, with its expression of enforced resignation, protesting, as clearly as her attitude, against her mother's discourse and the delight she took in it. The contrast between the two figures—the one so markedly rigid and repellent, the other all that was graceful, pliant, and pleasing—was a sharp one, and Caerleon, as he approached, found himself wishing emphatically, although in silence, that Nadia could manage to avoid the contamination of her surroundings without holding herself so aggressively aloof from them. Cyril was less reticent.

"Good gracious! how sulky that girl looks," he remarked. "Wretchedly bad form to listen to her mother's talk with that face on. Such talk as it is, too! I wish we had Madame O'Malachy at some of

the houses one goes to in London. Her conversational powers are lost out here."

"Perhaps Miss O'Malachy finds the talk less edifying than it is lively," said Caerleon, absently, trying to put himself in Nadia's place, and to realise the disgust which the stream of scandal and innuendo in which her mother delighted must arouse in her.

"Don't be a prig," was the sole answer vouchsafed by Cyril; and they went on and greeted the O'Malachys, and annexed two unoccupied chairs near them, Caerleon contriving to place himself beside Nadia, Cyril beside her mother. Presently the O'Malachy finished his penance, and they rose and sauntered together towards the hotel.

"We have heard from my son this morning, my dear marquis," said Madame O'Malachy to Caerleon. "He hopes to be with us to-morrow."

"Does he intend to make a long stay here?"

"Alas, no! He is still mad on the subject of Thracia, and insists on going there almost immediately. What can he expect but defeat and ruin? But he shall not go into danger alone. There are mineral springs at Tatarjé, which the O'Malachy has been advised to visit, and we shall all accompany my poor misguided Louis. We may not be able to do much, but at any rate we shall be near him."

"But if the country is in such a dangerous state, are you not afraid to visit it?" asked Caerleon.

"Afraid!" repeated Madame O'Malachy, high scorn in her tone. "My dear marquis, for what do you take us? We are accustomed to danger."

"I should rather like to see Thracia," remarked Caerleon, not very relevantly. "It must be a very interesting country."

"Then why wouldn't you and Lord Cyril come with us?" asked the O'Malachy.

"Oh no, my friend," cried his wife, "that would never do. Have you forgotten the unsettled state of Thracia? Do you not remember that the people hate travellers, throw all kinds of vexatious restrictions in their way, seize every opportunity of insulting and injuring them? Our dear marquis must not come. The country is positively dangerous."

"Is that intended as a reason for our not visiting it?" asked Caerleon. "Cyril, I think we'll make a tour in Thracia."

"Oh, all right," said Cyril. "I hope your will is made, though as I am to be with you, it won't much matter."

"But you cannot intend this in earnest?" asked Madame O'Malachy, with a most ingenuous air of simplicity. "I tell you that it is absolutely dangerous to go to Thracia."

"You are going the wrong way to keep our friends back, Barbara," said the O'Malachy. "Do you not know that to hear that a place is dangerous makes us their duty to visit it?"

"But these English are so strange!" cried his wife, with artless amazement. "They write letters to their 'Times' to complain if the slightest inconvenience touches them at a hotel, or if a street-boy calls them a bad name, and yet they go to look for danger when it is unnecessary."

"One of the contradictions of human nature," remarked the O'Malachy, grimly, but when he and his wife and daughter had reached their own room, he returned to the subject: "I don't know what you were driving at just now, Barbara. Were you really

trying to turn the young fellers back, or not? Caerleon is a decent boy enough. Was your heart suddenly filled with compassion for um, or were you trying to make terms with your conscience?"

"That is it," returned Madame O'Malachy, with a side-glance at her daughter. "I do not wish to have it on my conscience that I brought these young men into Thracia. It is not my affair."

"Then whose is it?" asked Nadia.

"I say," went on her mother, "that I have done all in my power to turn them back. *I* have not led them on to their ruin. *I* have not made myself disagreeable to my own family, and pleasant to them, that I might induce them to attach themselves to my company. When they get into trouble—into danger," raising her voice as Nadia rose hurriedly and left the room, "their blood will not be on *my* head."

"How you women hate one another!" laughed the O'Malachy, softly.

Louis O'Malachy arrived the next day, a dark-browed, taciturn, broad-shouldered young man, about a year older than Nadia, moving with a peculiar stiffness, as though his movements had always been restrained by a tight uniform, or by the orders of a drill-sergeant. He took a great fancy to Cyril,—at least, his mother said that he had done so, and it was quite true that he lost no opportunity of seeking his company. Indeed, the brothers found it almost impossible to escape from him, for whenever they went out, he invariably made his appearance, and offered himself as their companion. This being the case, Madame O'Malachy, out of compassion for

Caerleon, who found himself, as she phrased it, the unwelcome third in this devoted comradeship, fell into the habit of ordering Nadia to accompany her brother on all these occasions. To Caerleon himself she observed, with a cold-blooded frankness which reminded him of her daughter's first interview with him, that to no one but an Englishman would she think of permitting the privilege of escorting Mdlle. O'Malachy in her walks, but she understood that in England it was only when young people were not allowed to meet freely that there was any fear that complications might arise. She made this remark in Nadia's hearing, and the girl, who had resisted the proposal strenuously in private, yielded in sheer terror as to what her mother might proceed to say to Caerleon if she still hung back. She knew perfectly well that he divined her reason for coming, and pitied her for it, and the realisation plunged her into the depths of confusion and shame, sensations which were quite new to her. That she, who in her Seythian home had looked the whole world in the face, without a particle of fear, should now be trembling lest this Englishman, almost a stranger, should lay his finger on a quivering wound, made her abjectly miserable. It needed all Caerleon's tact, all his careful insistence on the *rôle* of friendly critic which he had adopted when they first met, to re-establish matters on a footing of any confidence between them. He succeeded in appearing so unconscious of anything wrong that she persuaded herself at last that he had not perceived the implication conveyed in her mother's words, and after this she was at ease with him again, and they discussed social and political problems, illustrated from the experience of each, to their hearts'

content, while Cyril and Louis luxuriated in Balkan politics. Cyril was deeply interested in this young enthusiast, and not a little puzzled by him also. Louis was still intending to proceed to Thracia in a few days, in order to offer his services to M. Drakovics, but his utterances on the subject were not marked by the fiery fanaticism which might have been expected from him on the authority of his past record.

"An enthusiast?" said Cyril to himself. "He's no more an enthusiast than I am, and that's putting it pretty strong. A plotter he may be. If he's a patriot, he's one of his father's stamp, the dynamite and dagger school. And yet only an enthusiast would have taken such a step as to throw up his commission in the Scythian army for the sake of joining the Thracians. But what is he doing here? If he means to go to Thracia, why not hurry on there at once? It's not like an enthusiast to stick for days doing nothing at Janoszwar. Perhaps he hopes to enlist Caerleon and me as volunteers. Perhaps he doesn't like Caerleon's dangling after his sister. Can that be it?"

He thought of the contemptuous sniff with which Louis had more than once manifested his opinion of the way in which Caerleon gravitated inevitably to Nadia's side when they took their walks, but otherwise there was nothing to show that he disapproved of the intimacy. He might not welcome it, but he was not actively hostile; by no word nor action would he influence the result in either direction.

"Is he a philosopher or a blackmailer?" soliloquised Cyril. "Or does he only think Caerleon is a fool? I know men often are amused when any one falls in love with their sisters, and I can't say that I wonder at it myself in this case. What Caerleon can

find to like in that sulky girl I can't imagine, but he really seems to be hooked this time."

Whatever Caerleon's inducement might be, he went on his way calmly, heeding neither Cyril's lack of sympathy nor young O'Malachy's scoffs, for he had now fully made up his mind about Nadia. At first he had been alternately attracted and repelled by her, but the repulsion had gradually faded before the attraction. The girl was so transparently honest, so sincere in her earnest intolerance, so unconventional in the way in which she persisted in testing everything by the standards of right and wrong, instead of those of custom and fashion, that the man who had turned in disgust from the artificiality of the frivolous or emancipated girls he had met in troops in London could not but hail her as a kindred spirit. It is true that she offended his taste and outraged his views of propriety twenty times a day by her decided utterances, but now that he knew what prompted these remarks he could honour the intention if he could not appreciate the result. And besides, she was softening, he was sure, under the influence of her friendship with him—he could not mistake the change; and it was seldom indeed that she addressed him nowadays with the abruptness which he had mentally stigmatised as *farouche* on his first meeting with her. In the society of her own family, however, this change was not visible, and she was still rigid, severe, uncompromisingly plain of speech. In his character of candid friend, Caerleon felt it to be his duty to take her to task occasionally on this subject.

"I wish," he said to her one day with some trepidation, for he had suffered more than once in his self-imposed task of smoothing down the angles of this

young lady's disposition, "that you could think it right to leave off apologising when you have said anything unpleasant. You have quite dropped it with me, you know, but you keep it up with my brother and your own people."

"But you told me that it was worse to you than the rude things I had said," objected Nadia, "and it is not so with the rest."

"No, indeed, they enjoy it," said Caerleon, "and that is just why I hate it. Can't you see that your brother and mine think it a good joke to stir you up to say rude things, just for the pleasure of hearing you apologise with a jerk the next minute?"

"Yes, I see it," she answered; "but that makes it all the better discipline for me."

"Not for me," said Caerleon. "I think your system ought to take some account of other people's feelings."

"But surely," she said, "if I give pleasure to my brother and yours by acting in this way, I am considering other people's feelings in doing it?"

Her voice as she asked the question was not particularly cheerful, but Caerleon treasured up the remark in his memory as the first approach to a joke that he had ever heard Nadia utter.

"Wouldn't it be equally good discipline," he said, "to stop before saying the rude things, and try to say something pleasant instead?"

"But that would not be true." Nadia regarded him with absolute horror. "Come what may, I must be true."

"It's rather presumptuous of me to quote texts to you," said Caerleon, "but isn't there something about 'speaking the truth in love'?"

"Why should it be presumptuous of you to quote texts to me?" she asked, quickly.

"Well, you see," he answered, with some hesitation, "I don't live by rule, as you do. I haven't a system of self-discipline, or anything of that sort."

"You think I am proud — conceited?" she said. "You think I set myself up upon a pedestal? Ah no, Lord Caerleon, I entreat you, do not think that. God knows how very weak and feeble I am, how continually I discover in myself that horrible temptation to insincerity. Since I have known you, it has beset me even more than before. Because I know that you are listening, I am perpetually tempted to let things pass, to join for politeness' sake in conversation that I know is wrong. You cannot tell what it costs me to speak out, and you try to make it harder for me."

"Indeed I don't wish to do that," said Caerleon, touched by the illogical reproach of her last sentence. "I only want to ask you whether you couldn't make your protests mentally, and not aloud. I never like to hear a girl speak to her mother as you do. Can't you make some allowance for her? She must have had a hard life—and bad training, perhaps. There may be more excuse for her than we think."

"I wish I knew it, then!" cried Nadia. "You have not seen as much of her as I have; you cannot know her as I do. She delights in intrigue for its own sake. It gives her an artistic pleasure to do a thing in a roundabout way instead of straight. Do you not see that it is far worse for me to realise this than it can be for you? You cannot tell what torture it was for me to find out, when I first came here from home—from my godmother's—that my mother would never tell the truth if a falsehood were possible. I felt that I must stand against her influence, or I might grow like her."

"I don't fancy you would," said Caerleon; "but of course, as you say, you are a better judge of your own circumstances than I am. I suppose you feel the same with reference to your brother. It seems as though you had scarcely a civil word for him."

"He has not many for me," said Nadia, drily. "No, I do not like Louis. He is not good."

"Not like him!" cried Caerleon. "But he is your brother."

"I hope I love him," said Nadia, meditatively. "I should not like anything bad to happen to him. To do him good—to save his soul—I would die, oh, how willingly! But I cannot like him."

"But wouldn't you be better able to do him good if you did like him?" asked Caerleon. Nadia considered for a moment.

"I can't help it. One cannot like a person who one knows is not good. You yourself, if Milord Cyril were to become false, to break his faith, you could not like him any longer."

"I see what you mean, but I'm afraid I should have a sneaking fondness for the poor old chap still," said Caerleon. "But has your brother done anything, that you should talk of him in this way?"

"I do not *know*," was the reply. "I only guess. They tell me nothing. But I have found out enough to be sure about him."

"And what is that?" asked Caerleon, incautiously. Nadia drew herself up.

"That I cannot tell you, Lord Caerleon. If you had now any interest in Thracia, or were likely to be at all affected by my brother's doings, I might tell you what I believe to be the truth, but you cannot expect me to gratify mere curiosity."

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," said Caerleon, taken aback by this outburst. "Pray don't think that I want to know anything you don't wish to tell me."

"Please forgive me," said Nadia. "I was rude again. Only I am afraid of telling you what I ought not, and I don't wish to be disloyal, even to my family."

"I quite understand," said Caerleon, although at the very moment he was reflecting that the ins and outs of a woman's mind were beyond the wit of man to penetrate. "But tell me what you mean by saying if I had any interest in Thracia? I remember that on the day I met you first you told me you were sorry when I declined the crown. Why was it?"

"Because I thought you ought to have accepted it," returned Nadia. Then, fearing that her tone had been slightly dictatorial, she added, hastily, "I mean that if I had been in your place I should have accepted it."

"But you thought so—you, a Scythian in politics?" asked Caerleon.

"I thought I had told you that our circle—my godmother's—are not necessarily Scythian in politics," said Nadia. "We desire to take the side of justice, of right. I am certain that if Scythia were to enter on an unrighteous war, Count Wratisloff would lift up his voice against it at once. And so we desired for Thracia only the man who would be most likely to rule it well."

"Then you think I ought to have accepted the crown?" said Caerleon again. She caught him up quickly.

"I cannot judge for you. Only your own conscience can do that. But I have always been taught never to refuse work that offered itself unsought, unless it would interfere with other work on which one was already engaged, and even then one should consider carefully

which was the more important of the two. You know best where your responsibilities would have been greatest—in Thracia, or at home in England. Wherever there was most to do, there your work lay, I think. And you might have done so much for Thracia!"

"But would you have had me go there against my father's express wish?" asked Caerleon, indignantly. "If you will allow me to have had a conscience at all in the matter, I believe it pointed distinctly to staying at home as the right thing for me to do."

"That made a difference," assented Nadia. "I cannot judge of your circumstances for you, as I have said, but I was sorry at the time that you refused the crown, and I am sorry still that you are not King of Thracia now. You might do so much good there."

A little annoyed by her persistence, Caerleon walked on beside her in silence for a while. They had left Cyril and Louis far behind, and were following a path which presently crossed the main road cut through the mountains. At ordinary times the road was almost as lonely as the rocky paths, but on this occasion a band of men were visible in the distance, coming from the direction of the plain.

"It must be some of the Thracian harvesters," said Nadia. "When their own harvest is ended, numbers of them cross into Hungary and hire themselves out to help the farmers, for the corn ripens later here. I suppose they are returning home with their wages, now that the harvest is over."

As they walked on, they gained a closer view of the Thracians, a body of tall, lithe, dark-skinned men, tired and footsore, wearing ragged clothes that had once been gaily coloured, shirts that had once been white, and

great leather boots. They slackened their pace as they approached the strangers, and one man, who seemed to be the leader of the party, addressed Nadia in broken German.

"Oh, the poor things!" she said, turning to Caerleon. "This has been a terribly bad year for them. The rain and the floods have injured the corn so much that there was scarcely any harvest. They have only earned enough to keep them while at work, and they have nothing to buy food with on their journey home. I wish I could give them something, but I have no money," and she exhibited an empty purse as she spoke.

"Poor beggars!" said Caerleon. "Give them this, Miss O'Malachy," and he turned a handful of loose coin out of his pocket and poured it into Nadia's hand. She gave it to the man, who was profuse in his gratitude, and rapidly reckoning up the value of the money, said that it would be enough to feed himself and his companions until they reached their homes. Turning over the coins in his hand as if to assure himself of their reality, he came upon an English shilling, and looked at it in a puzzled way.

"Tell him that it's all right, and that he can get it changed in the first big town he comes to," said Caerleon to Nadia; but when she interpreted the words to the man, he scouted the idea that there was anything wrong about the coin. They liked English things, he said, and he would make a hole in the shilling and wear it in memory of the gracious lady who had given it to him.

"Oh, but it was not mine," said Nadia, hastily. "You must thank Lord Caerleon."

"Lor' Carlin'?" repeated the man, puzzled. Then, as Nadia pointed to Caerleon, his face beamed with delight. "Not Carlino? the English Prince Carlino?"

"Yes," said Nadia. "Prince and king are the only titles they understand," she added, to Caerleon, who was suffering agonies of embarrassment at the moment, for the man went down on his knees before him, and kissed his hand and laid it on his head. Then, before Caerleon could protest, he had risen, and was beckoning frantically to his companions, calling out to them in an unknown tongue.

"This is too much," said Caerleon to Nadia. "I shall tell them that you gave them the money after all."

"But that would not be true," responded Nadia, in her matter-of-fact way; and Caerleon was forced to allow his hand to be kissed by each of the men in turn, the leader closing the ceremony by going through it himself a second time, saying earnestly in his barbarous German—

"Ah, why did not your Highness come to Thracia?"

"There!" said Nadia, when they had gone on their way, followed by the blessings of the Thracians, "think how much you might have done for these poor men if you had been king. The whole country is desolate, or only half cultivated. It needs draining, improving, farming on proper methods. You Englishmen all understand farming, don't you? You could teach them just the things they ought to learn, and introduce English implements. And then, you could also enforce temperance legislation. The people drink dreadfully, rich and poor alike, and there is no Government control of the liquor traffic. It would be virgin soil, the ideal spot for testing all the schemes. You could try as many experiments as you liked, even if you did not insist on total prohibition at once."

"I'm afraid I should experiment myself off the throne

in no time," said Caerleon, laughing, but Nadia glanced at him without a smile.

"Better to fall through doing right than to succeed through doing wrong," she said.

"You are oracular to-day," said Caerleon, but this made her angry, and she told him that as he did not like the way she talked, she would not talk at all,—a decision to which she adhered persistently, so that they returned to the hotel in silence. Her petulance was the more provoking in that this was their last day at Janoszwar, and that on the morrow the O'Malachy family would start on their journey to Thracia, while Cyril and Caerleon continued their walking-tour. It was their intention first to visit a number of ruined castles and other objects of interest out of the beaten track, and then to rejoin their friends at Witska, a mountain village celebrated for a medicinal spring, and situated exactly on the Thracian frontier. Just at the last moment Louis O'Malachy volunteered to accompany them on their tramp, and as they could not very well refuse his offer they accepted it, although neither of them anticipated much pleasure from his society.

"He must be up to something," soliloquised Cyril; "but what can it be? I suppose we have merely to await developments; but meanwhile, to avoid any risk of accident, I will get Miss O'Malachy to do a little piece of business for me."

This piece of business was merely the posting of the letter of introduction to M. Drakovics which Mrs Sadleir had intrusted to Cyril; but he had an idea that Louis might wish, for some reason of his own, to intercept the missive if he knew of its existence, or even saw it posted, for he could not rid himself of the notion that the taciturn young patriot had other ends in view than

that of furthering the independence of Thracia. Acting on this resolution, he succeeded in finding Nadia alone, and gave the letter into her charge, to be posted as soon as possible after her arrival on Thracian soil, adding at a venture that it might prove to have an important effect on the after-history of Europe. He saw at once that she understood what he meant, and that she sympathised with his object, for her face lighted up.

"I see. I will be most careful. I thank you for trusting me—for letting me help, Lord Cyril."

"What a fanatic the girl is!" said Cyril to himself, as he went his way; but he entertained a comfortable conviction that it was rather safer to trust a fanatic than a cynic, and he felt secure as to the fate of Mrs Sadleir's letter, and the note he had written to accompany it. An hour later he left Janoszwar with Caerleon and Louis, and they began a tour for which none of them cared much, except to count the days until it should come to an end. Caerleon missed his talks with Nadia, Cyril was anxious to get to Witska and see whether the letter had produced any effect on M. Drakovics, and Louis displayed an eagerness to reach Thracia, and enlist in the patriot army, which was rather inconsistent with his having come on the tour at all. In consequence, they clung most carefully to the route they had laid down previously, and no one suggested digressions even when the most famous ruins or inviting landscapes were found to lie just a few hours' march off the road. On the very day they had fixed they reached Witska, a picturesque little town with rocky streets, and whitewashed houses clinging to the steep hillside, and found it filled with numbers of men from the plains in their holiday attire.

CHAPTER V.

A CALL OF DUTY.

"**THERE** must be a fair or festival of some sort going on," said Caerleon, as they made their way to the inn, where it had been arranged that the O'Malachy was to secure rooms for them.

"Perhaps the people have come together to do you honour," suggested Louis, lightly enough, but it struck Cyril that there was a shade of anxiety in his tone.

The inn was an oriental-looking house built round a courtyard, but conforming to the customs of the West so far as to possess a coffee-room—a fact which was proudly announced in German and Thracian in very large letters. There were no windows on the exterior of the house to the ground-floor rooms, a testimony to the frequent occurrence of border raids and attacks from brigands in the days when the inn was built, but balconies ran round each of the two upper storeys, both inside and outside, giving the only means of access to the rooms which opened upon them. The courtyard was thronged with people, among whom Caerleon fancied he recognised some of the harvesters that Nadia and he had met a fortnight before, and they watched with breathless curiosity the three dusty figures in tourist

suits and hobnailed boots, and commented upon their appearance audibly but unintelligibly. The landlord, who met them at the door, bowed almost to the ground before them, but as he could speak no tongue of Western Europe, they were unable to question him as to the nature of the attraction which had brought the crowd together. Behind him, however, stood Wright the groom, doing his best to compose his face, which had wreathed itself into an irrepressible grin of delight at welcoming his master, into the blank immobility which he considered becoming and suitable. In his hand was a visiting-card, which he presented to Caerleon.

"The gentleman up-stairs give it me for you, my lord, and 'e's waitin' for you in the coffee-room, and I do 'ope, my lord, if I may make so bold, as your lordship don't think of stayin' long in this 'ere country, where there ain't a creetur can speak a word of a Crishtan tongue."

"That remains to be seen," said Cyril, looking round Caerleon's shoulder at the card, and seeing, as he expected, the name of M. Drakovics.

"Has the old brute come to plague me again about his precious kingdom?" said Caerleon, impatiently. "He might have waited until I had made myself respectable, at any rate. Well, I suppose I must see him, but I'll wash off a little of the dust of travel first"—"and just ask Nadia what she really thinks about the business," he added to himself, as Wright led the way up-stairs, and along the gallery which crossed the front of the house.

"Which are the O'Malachy's rooms, Wright?" he asked aloud, but as he spoke, Madame O'Malachy glided out of a doorway near him with her finger on her lip.

"Ah, my dear marquis, I am enchanted to see you!" she said, brightly. "But I will not detain you; you are summoned to more important business than talking with a chattering old woman—is it not so? Only I would ask you to have the great kindness to step softly and not to speak loud, for my daughter is a little indisposed."

"Miss O'Malachy ill? I hope it is not serious?" cried Caerleon.

"Nothing serious, I assure you. Merely a slight headache and lassitude, which will pass off to-morrow. Rest and quiet are her best medicines. She is too energetic, too eager for work, my dear marquis, but I know that I may count on your consideration."

She went back into her room, and Caerleon pursued his way disappointed.

"I shan't be able to ask her about this wretched kingdom, then," he grumbled to himself. "But, after all, I know what she thinks, for she gave me her views pretty plainly the last time I talked to her."

"The old gentleman seemed to be in a orful 'urry, my lord," put in Wright, and Caerleon made a hasty toilet, and entered the coffee-room, where M. Drakovics was marching impatiently from the door to the window and back again. Caerleon would have shaken hands with him, but he drew back with a low bow.

"Your Majesty," he said, "I am here to announce to you that by a *plébiscite* of the whole nation you are a second time invited to occupy the throne of Thracia. I have with me a petition signed by every member of the Legislative Assembly, and by the mayor of every township and the head of every village community in the country, entreating you to lay aside your scruples, and come to our help. The people will accept any condi-

tions you may choose to make, as to advisers, Civil List, or anything of the kind ;—I know that this will not affect your decision,” as Caerleon turned away with an impatient gesture, “but I mention it to show you that the Thracians wish to deal generously with the man who will honour them by taking up their cause against the world.”

“I must have the night to think it over,” said Caerleon, after some moments of futile consideration. “You will remain here as my guest, I hope? By the bye, who are all the people outside?”

“They are your Majesty’s loyal subjects,” returned M. Drakovics, “who have come here to conduct you, as they hope, in triumph to Bellaviste.”

“Very kind of them,” said Caerleon, “but I am not their king yet. This proceeding looks unpleasantly like compulsion, M. Drakovics. I have no idea of being made king by force.”

“Your Majesty is entirely mistaken,” returned M. Drakovics in alarm. “These men are here with the sole intention of doing you honour, and of adding their entreaties to mine if you should prove to be still obdurate. They are all patriots, almost in despair for their country, for we are convinced that Scythia is meditating some great blow against us.”

“Well, I will think about it,” said Caerleon, and no further allusion was made to the subject during the evening.

On the plea of extreme fatigue, Caerleon and Cyril excused themselves to their guest as early as was possible with due regard for politeness, and prepared to consider the situation in concert. Leaning out of the window of Caerleon’s room, with the watch-fires of the expectant Thracians staring the mountain-slopes on

every hand, they discussed the subject in all its bearings. As was generally the case on such occasions, Cyril did most of the talking, and he summed up his arguments very concisely before they separated for the night.

"The question is just this, Caerleon: have you backbone enough to be a Thracian for the future, instead of an Englishman? That's what it will come to, you know. There will be the most awful row at home, and we may find ourselves outlawed, or declared guilty of high treason, or I don't know what. So long as we keep to Thracian soil, we shall be all right, if we can only manage to stay there; but I suppose if we ventured into any British possession they might put us in prison and keep us there out of harm's way. Scythia is bound to make a fuss, and to send the strongest possible diplomatic representations to St James's about us even if she doesn't go to war, and you must make up your mind to disregard appeals and commands, from whomsoever they may come, and public opinion too. You won't any longer be a British peer, poor, perhaps, but universally looked up to—but an adventurer,—a filibuster, in fact. That's the bad side of it. On the other hand, you consider that your country has treated you pretty shabbily, and holds out no particular prospects to you in your present circumstances. Forfar and the Duke never did much for you either, and I don't see that you need refuse such an offer as this just to save them from diplomatic complications. Of course, if the worst came to the worst, you might sacrifice yourself, and abdicate magnanimously in order to prevent a European war, but I don't think it will get as far as that. Scythia will brag and bluster—perhaps try to put you out of the way, but that is our private affair. And in Thracia you have just the field you have always wanted for your

administrative and philanthropic talents. From what Drakovics says, they seem to have a fairly good army, but very little else. You will have to make the nation. Oh, there's no question as to which is the biggest thing to do. As King of Thracia, in the people's present state of mind, your opportunities would be limitless."

"And that is what one ought to think of," said Caerleon, recalling Nadia's words. "Cyril, old man, I'll take it."

"Good for you, old chap," returned Cyril. "I say, I suppose I shall have to call you 'your Majesty' now—in public, that is. Behind the scenes, the augurs may wink as they please. Well, I bag the post of your private secretary, at any rate. That will enable me to give your Majesty a good wigging when I think it called for, and to keep you from getting into trouble. Well, now that your royal mind is made up, I'm off. Ta, ta."

When the two young men entered the coffee-room in the morning, M. Drakovics advanced to meet them, far too anxious as to the result of their conference to let the matter rest until after breakfast, as Caerleon had intended. The Premier's face was worn and haggard with anxiety, and his voice shook as he asked—

"May I inquire whether your Majesty has decided what course you will take?"

"Yes," said Caerleon. "I have made up my mind to accept the crown."

He had no time to say more, for, to his horror and Cyril's delight, M. Drakovics fell at his feet and covered his hands with kisses, while he tried in vain to induce him to rise. Cyril recovered himself first.

"Perhaps we might postpone any further raptures until after breakfast," he suggested, mildly. "Even kings have appetites,—their brothers certainly have."

"One moment!" cried M. Drakovics, rising and going towards the window. "Your majesty cannot tell what a load you have taken from my heart," he added, huskily, turning again to Caerleon. "I am satisfied now as to the future of my country. But I must tell the people. They have been as anxious as myself, and they will rejoice as I do."

He stepped out on the balcony, and addressed the crowd of Thracians, who had again gathered in front of the house. A tremendous shout burst from them when he had finished speaking. Turning round with blazing eyes he beckoned to Caerleon.

"Show yourself to your people, your Majesty. Speak a few words to them—I will interpret—and they will love you for ever."

Caerleon followed him out, intending to comply with the request, but speech was impossible in presence of the cry of welcome that went up as soon as he became visible. For some minutes he was perforce silent, while the people shouted themselves hoarse, flung their caps into the air, leaped for joy, embraced one another, and wept copiously. He felt oddly reminded of his coming of age, and how he had risen to make his speech at the great dinner his father had given to the Llandiarmid tenants amid a scene of excitement such as this, when the sturdy farmers had sprung up like one man, and drunk his health with acclamations. They had presented him with an old silver punch-bowl—rather an incongruous gift for an uncompromising temperance man—and it had put him into an awkward predicament. A happy thought had struck him, he remembered, and he had told them that he would use the bowl for salad—a statement which was regarded as an exquisite joke, and received with shouts of approving

laughter. It was queer that this should all pass through his mind now, as he stood waiting until the rejoicing calmed down a little, and he was able to obtain a moment's silence. He found himself almost as much at a loss for words as on that earlier occasion, but at last he managed to say—

"Gentlemen" (he felt strongly that this form of address sounded as though he were speaking to his former constituents rather than to his subjects, but it was difficult to know what other to use. "My people" would be a ridiculous affectation as yet, and "Men of Thracia" sounded theatrical). "Gentlemen, your trusted leader, M. Drakovics, has done me the honour of inviting me in your name to accept the crown of Thracia. It is only fair for me to tell you that I don't feel at all equal to the task of governing; but I have thought over the matter, and I hope that I am doing the right thing in undertaking it. God helping me, my sole aim will be to do what I can for the good of Thracia and the peace of Europe. I feel sure that I may count upon the help and advice of M. Drakovics in the difficulties which are sure to meet us, and I can promise to stick to you if you will stick to me."

There! it was over, and he was conscious that he had made a wretched mull of what he had meant to say, and felt certain that Cyril was grinning behind him, and maturing chaff on the subject of "House of Commons oratory," but M. Drakovics was translating his words to the Thracians, and they were replying with shouts of applause which echoed back from the mountain-side.

"Long live the English prince! Long live King Carlino! Down with Scythia! Long live Thracia and King Carlino!"

"I say, you know, this won't do," Cyril was saying to M. Drakovics, as soon as the three on the balcony could hear each other speak. "What do they mean by talking like that? His name is Philip. He can't go down to posterity as King Caerleon. It would be as bad as King York or King Lancaster. You must put them right."

"That we can do in his Majesty's proclamations," said M. Drakovics. "The people have grown so much accustomed to the name Carlino that I fear they will always apply it to him. It sounds familiar to their ears, and it is a kind of affectionate diminutive. But with regard to our future plans——" he went on, addressing Caerleon. "Will your Majesty allow me to tell the people that you will start to-day on your journey to Bellaviste?"

"Is it really necessary?" asked Caerleon. "I hate doing things in such a hurry."

"It is absolutely necessary," returned M. Drakovics, "that your Majesty should be crowned as speedily as possible. The whole future of your reign may depend upon it."

"Oh, very well," said Caerleon. "In for a penny, in for a pound. I have to live for Thracia now, I suppose. I'll tell my man to pack up."

He went back into the room before M. Drakovics could forestall him, or even intimate to Cyril that it would look well for him to do his brother's errands in future, and ran up-stairs to look for Wright, for bells there were none in this primitive hostelry. But Wright and the reason for seeking him were speedily forgotten when he reached the upper balcony, for he saw Nadia coming towards him from the direction of the rooms occupied by the O'Malachy family.

"I hope you are better this morning," he said, eagerly, hastening to meet her. "I am so glad to see that you are able to be up."

"But I am always up at six," said Nadia. "Did you think I was ill?"

"I understood from your mother——" he began, but remembering that to finish would be to charge Madaine O'Malachy with deceiving him, he changed the form of his sentence lamely enough, "I saw nothing of you when I got here yesterday, you know, and I was afraid you were not well."

"Did you expect to find me at the gate waiting for you?" asked Nadia, sharply. "Oh, I did not intend to be so rude," and she blushed crimson. "I only mean that my room is at the back of the house, and I did not even know you had arrived."

"I was hoping," said Caerleon, deliberately, "that we might meet again as friends, though I was so unfortunate as to offend you the last time we had a talk."

"Now you are trying to make me ashamed of myself for being cross," said Nadia, "and it is not kind of you. Lord Caerleon," she broke off suddenly, and surveyed him with puzzled eyes, "has anything happened? What is the matter?"

"Why?" he asked.

"Because you look different. Something has happened. What is it?"

"Well, I am once more king elect, or designate, or whatever you like to call it, of Thracia, if that will account for it. I didn't know that the divinity that doth hedge a king was visible outwardly, but I suppose that's what you mean."

"You have accepted the crown?" she asked, anxiously.

"I have accepted it, bearing in mind my last conversation with you. I hope you are pleased with me now?"

"It was what I said that influenced you to consent? You would not have done it otherwise?"

"Scarcely, I think; but you showed me my duty so very clearly that I could hardly turn my back on it. You made it quite evident that you considered I was shirking responsibility when I refused the crown before."

"But how can it signify what I thought of you? How can my conscience judge for yours? Oh, I have been thinking often since we have been here that I may have led you wrong. I ought to have advised you to see which was the harder to do—to accept or decline the crown—and to choose that."

"But this is a new standard!" cried Caerleon. "Is it to take the place of the measuring of the responsibilities?"

"Not exactly; only to be used with it. Don't you see? Perhaps you prefer a responsible position, and then it might be better for you to take a lower place."

"I don't quite see it," said Caerleon; "but no doubt it's all right, since it satisfies you."

"Oh, don't follow me!" she cried, passionately. "I may have led you wrong already. Is it too late to do anything?"

"Quite too late, I'm afraid," said Caerleon. "I am as much King of Thracia as I can be before I'm crowned, I suppose. Won't you congratulate me on my elevation, since I owe it to your influence?"

He held out his hand, and Nadia took it, but to his horror she stooped and touched it with her lips. "May God grant your Majesty a long and useful

reign!" she said, and turned to fly, but Caerleon caught her wrist.

"Nadia, are you joking?" he said, angrily.

"Let me go! let me go!" she panted. "Oh, please let me go!" The cry seemed to be wrung from her by some sudden sharp pain, and Caerleon saw that her lips were quivering and her eyes full of tears. He loosed his hold, and she made her escape, leaving him gazing stupidly at the hand she had kissed.

"Oh, this little fool!" groaned Madame O'Malachy, at the partially open door of her room, whence she had witnessed the whole scene. "She might have had him at her feet at this moment, and now he may not be able to declare himself for weeks. And for what? A trifle, a caprice, a nothing! I snap my fingers at it! Will nothing but a crowned king serve you, mademoiselle? Surely it is as well to receive a crown with your husband as after him? Ah, these niceties of lovers' etiquette! Who cares whether the marquis thinks that his prospective kingdom has induced you to accept him, or not? You know, and I know, that you have been in love with him since the second time you saw him. Fool! I have no patience with you," and hurling these words through her clenched teeth at the absent Nadia, her mother hurried through two or three intermediate rooms and came upon Caerleon through a door at the end of the balcony.

"What, my dear marquis, is it you?" she cried, with a start. "You are early this morning. But perhaps I ought to say 'your Majesty'? One cannot pretend not to know the reason of M. Drakovics's presence here."

"I hope M. Drakovics is happy," returned Caerleon, in a tone which showed pretty plainly that he himself

was not. "I have accepted the offer of the Thracian crown."

"Then I congratulate the Thracians," said Madame O'Malachy, heartily. "My dear marquis (you really must excuse my employing the old title), I have seldom heard a more delightful piece of news. The Thracians could not do better, and for yourself it is a situation exactly adapted to your character and talents. You have your opportunity now."

"I thought so myself until a minute ago," said Caerleon, gloomily; "but now I begin to doubt it. Nadia will have nothing to say to me."

"Nadia—my daughter?" with a slight elevation of the eyebrows.

"Yes," said Caerleon, scarcely noticing the touch of *hauteur* which the lady had infused into her tone. "She seemed so much disappointed about my having refused the crown before that I thought she would certainly be pleased now, and she—she spoke as if she had never met me before in her life."

"But that may be quite as well," returned Madame O'Malachy, gracefully determined not to be baulked of her point. "You must remember that the friendship *à l'anglaise* which has subsisted hitherto between your Majesty and my daughter cannot continue under present circumstances. You will now occupy very different positions."

"Is that what Miss O'Malachy is thinking?" asked Caerleon, quickly.

"I have not spoken to her on the subject, but I have no doubt that she has that in her mind."

"Then might I beg that you will have the kindness to let me see her again at once, madame? I will do my best to disabuse her of the idea."

"But what will you do, my dear marquis?"

"Ask her to share the throne with me."

"But it is impossible!" cried Madame O'Malachy. "I cannot hear of such a thing. Your Majesty's chivalrous sentiments have carried you away, and you are willing to atone for a slight mistake by a lifelong sacrifice. Your friendship was a mistake—I admit it freely, in view of the events which have since come to pass—but we will not make matters worse by over-estimating it. I sympathise with you, but I assure you that you need fear no trouble from us. Suffer us simply to retire quietly—we will not force ourselves upon your notice, and my daughter is far too proud to exhibit any regret for what has happened."

"But you don't understand, madame," cried Caerleon, impatiently. "There is nothing to regret in our friendship—on my side, at any rate. Of course I can't answer for Miss O'Malachy's feelings, but I am only anxious to replace the friendship by—by something stronger."

"My dear marquis, I honour your chivalry, but your future is not in your own hands. M. Drakovics will have something to say about it."

"M. Drakovics will have nothing to say on the subject of my marriage. That is a question I shall settle for myself."

"But you must consider your kingdom. Much may depend on your marriage, and an alliance with a penniless girl not of royal blood—in modern times, at any rate," she laughed, "might do you a great deal of harm."

"I don't think I am called upon to consider my kingdom to such an extent as that," said Caerleon. "I am anxious to have the matter settled before I am crowned,

so that if the Thracians think themselves entitled to complain, they may do it before I am irrevocably their king."

"But there is no need to publish your determination," said Madame O'Malachy, anxiously. "It would sound as though you wished to defy M. Drakovics and his party. And there is another reason why you must proceed very cautiously, and that is Nadia herself. You may trust me—I am an old woman, old and experienced, and Nadia is very young and foolish. As a woman of the world, I can appreciate your willingness to jeopardise your position for her sake; but you know what she is—an eccentric, a fanatic. I am convinced that she fears being thought to pursue you on account of your kingdom, and thinks also that you may have perceived her feelings towards you, and only desire to marry her out of pity."

Caerleon stood pondering. He knew that the woman before him was false to the core—that very morning had given him another proof of the fact—but her words sounded so likely to be true, and the state of feeling they described so characteristic of Nadia, that he was bound to believe them. After all, she was Nadia's mother, and ought to understand her, and what interest could she have in misrepresenting things in this case? It was only natural to suppose that she would be more likely to strain every nerve to forward his wishes than to put obstacles in his way. Moreover, he had now confided in her to such an extent that he might as well throw himself on her compassion altogether.

"But what can I do?" he asked. "You will let me see her and plead my cause?"

"Not at present, if you are a wise man," said Madame

O'Malachy. "Leave her to herself for a little. Let her please her pride with the belief that she has repulsed you effectually—her heart will suffer all the more. Then, when you are in your rightful place at Bellaviste, with all your splendour about you, speak to her again. She must see then that you seek her only because you love her, and she will be thankful to perceive it."

"But how shall I see her at Bellaviste?" asked Caerleon. "Are you going on there?"

"Have you forgotten," asked Madame O'Malachy, rather reproachfully, "that it has always been our intention to accompany Louis when he goes to try and obtain a post in the Thracian army? Shall we be less likely to visit Thracia now that we have a friend upon the throne?"

"But why not come on with us now?" asked Caerleon. "May I not have the pleasure of receiving you as my guests? I don't know the capacity of the palace at Bellaviste; but it must certainly be large enough to accommodate your party, if you don't mind roughing it for a time in a bachelor's household."

"A thousand thanks," said Madame O'Malachy, with her sweetest smile, "but I am afraid we must decline your hospitable proposition. However, we will certainly continue our journey into your kingdom, and no doubt there will be a hotel at Bellaviste which can take us in. Rely upon me as your friend. I am not an enthusiast, I do not pretend to have no regard for the splendours of a throne, but I wish you well, and what help I can give you with this daughter of mine I will."

And with this assurance of support Caerleon was obliged to be content.

CHAPTER VI.

A ROYAL PROGRESS.

"WHERE is the King?" asked M. Drakovics, coming into the coffee-room hastily about an hour later, and finding only Cyril, who was engaged in performing some complicated operation with a bradawl and the strap of a knapsack.

"His Majesty," returned Cyril, in the choicest 'Court Circular' style, "is walking out this morning, and at this moment is probably conversing in a friendly spirit with some of his faithful subjects, through the medium of Mr Louis O'Malachy."

"These O'Malachys again!" cried M. Drakovics. "This must be stopped!"

He turned angrily to leave the room, but Cyril was at the door before him.

"One moment, monsieur. I wish to know on what terms we are to stand?"

"I do not understand you, milord"—M. Drakovics was astonished—"but I hope to satisfy you later. Meanwhile, are you aware that Colonel O'Malachy and his family leave this place to-day, before his Majesty, for Bellaviste, and intend to reside there for the present? That cannot be allowed."

"Now we have come to the point," said Cyril. "I want a plain answer to a plain question, M. Drakovics. Are you and I to work together or not? If we are to be friends, I will tell you at once that you are meditating a very great mistake, and that I should be glad to help you to avoid it."

"Milord!" The Kossuth of the Balkans looked Cyril up and down in amazement visibly mingled with scorn. "I am highly honoured by your offer of co-operation, but my dull mind fails to perceive its advantages."

"No?" said Cyril, with unruffled good-humour, "and yet there are two very obvious ones. In the first place, you have to reckon with my influence over my brother. You cannot persuade yourself that you know him as well as I do, and if you consider the matter a little, I think you will see that my advice is quite as likely to be followed as yours, and that the consequences of this might be unpleasant if you and I had the misfortune to disagree. In the second place, although you are very clever and very powerful, you are neither omnipotent nor omniscient, and there are circumstances in which the help of a man who has a certain amount of knowledge of the world, and some slight experience in diplomacy, might possibly stand you in good stead, even though he were the humble individual before you."

M. Drakovics gasped. The colossal impudence of his sovereign's brother appeared literally to take away his breath. "If you were not an Englishman," he said, slowly, "I should think that you wanted to be bought off."

"But since I am an Englishman," said Cyril, "you can't quite see what Thracia could offer me that I should care for; and you are about right there. I

am going in for this business just for the fun of the thing, and for the sake of backing up Caerleon. I don't know, of course, what Mrs Sadleir told you about me in the letter I forwarded; but from what she said when she wrote it, I think she must have let you know what my views were."

"She did," said M. Drakovics, with some hesitation, "but still——" He looked thoughtfully at Cyril for a moment, and then spoke quickly, "You have no doubt studied carefully the present position of affairs in the Balkans, milord. What should be my course at the moment with regard to Roum, which holds suzerain rights over Thracia?"

"Despatch a special messenger, well provided with money, to Czarigrad immediately," said Cyril, without an instant's pause. "Make the Government there see that the election of an Englishman as king is a fresh bulwark against Scythian aggression. Secure their moral support at any cost, and get an assurance, no matter what you have to pay for it, that even if Scythia brings pressure on them to censure or disavow your action, they will at least take no active steps against you."

"Excellent!" cried M. Drakovics. "My dear friend, the messenger has already started. How your ideas jump with mine! But tell me, what next?"

"Send off immediately notes to the various Powers, informing them of my brother's election, and inviting their sovereigns to be present at the coronation. Once the despatches are gone, don't lose a minute. Instead of heading straight for Bellaviste, let us go at once to the nearest city or monastery where an archbishop is to be found. Beg, borrow, or buy a crown—you could make one with two or three of those gold plates from

the *icons*, fastened together—and get Caerleon crowned without the smallest delay. Remonstrances from the Powers will be beginning to pour in by that time, of course; but they will have to follow you about the country, and you won't open them until after the ceremony. Then you will regret that they arrived so late that, in the bustle and rush attendant upon the coronation, they remained unnoticed."

"Oh, my friend, why were you not born a Thracian?" cried M. Drakovics, seizing Cyril in his arms, and imprinting a fervent kiss on each of his cheeks. "Your plan is almost perfect: it has only one drawback—that it is impossible. Every King of Thracia must be crowned in the chapel of St Peter at Bellaviste. It is a small, rude building, standing in the quadrangle of the palace, and in it Alexander Franz, first of the name—the patriot king—saw a vision of St Peter, the night before the great battle in which he burst the Roumi yoke. No other coronation would be valid in the opinion of the people, nor can the crown be legally removed from the chapel. It is kept in a great chest built into the wall, of which I hold one key, the Metropolitan another, and the king the third. I have it now to deliver to his Majesty, but none of the keys will open the box without the other two. Your brother cannot be crowned until we reach Bellaviste, for no make-shift crown would be tolerated by the Thracians."

"It is an enormous pity," said Cyril. "Time is everything to us just now. Why not disregard the superstition of the people, and spring on them a king ready crowned, and safe on his throne?"

"Ah, you do not know my countrymen," said M. Drakovics, sorrowfully. "Such a thing would be an outrage, a defiance of their religious feelings. No, we

must wait until we reach Bellaviste; but I will take your advice as to the protests from the Powers. What is your feeling about Scythia?"

"Send the same note to her as to the other Powers; but let it be well understood privately that if she makes one hostile movement, you are prepared to contest every inch of ground, and will at the same moment throw yourself upon the protection of Pannonia, who will be only too ready to interfere if there is any likelihood of war in the Balkans, and will be supported by her allies. Meanwhile, see that your army is ready to mobilise at the shortest notice, and look out for Scythian spies."

"But that is my very point!" cried M. Drakovics. "These O'Malachys are Scythian spies, all of them. That is one imperative reason for their not being allowed to approach Bellaviste, and the other is that Madame O'Malachy is anxious to entrap the King into marrying her daughter."

"Let us take the charges one at a time," said Cyril, calmly. "The O'Malachy and his wife are spies—there is no doubt of that—but for that very reason I would not only welcome them to Bellaviste, but I would find room for them in the palace itself, if I could."

"You are joking!" said M. Drakovics, in astonishment.

"Not at all, I assure you. Think a moment. The more completely we can treat the O'Malachy family as my brother's guests, the better we can have them under observation. There is such a thing as a censorship even of private letters and telegrams in disturbed times, I believe; and it would be easier to work it with people we knew, and on whom we kept a constant watch, than with obscure persons whose doings might escape our

attention. Again, expelled from Thracia, which is what I suppose you would suggest, the O'Malachys would linger just across the frontier, setting in motion a whole horde of spies, all of whom we could not hope to discover, while we could never be sure that they themselves had not re-entered the kingdom in some disguise. It certainly seems a bold thing to admit them into the very heart of our defences, but they would be clever if they managed to see more than they were meant to see."

"But about Mademoiselle?" asked M. Drakovics, anxiously. "The King cannot marry her. He must form an alliance which will strengthen his throne."

"You are right,—he must. But did you intend to tell him so? I know Caerleon a good deal better than you do, and you may take my word for it that as soon as you had finished your remarks he would go straight to Miss O'Malachy and lay the crown at her feet. So far as he is concerned, you must let the matter take its course. Nothing can be said to him."

"But how, then, would you prevent it?" cried M. Drakovics. "Is the girl to be kidnapped and carried off?"

"My good sir—no! Do you want all Europe in a ferment, and Caerleon throwing up the kingdom to go and look for her? The O'Malachy and his wife would make the finest political capital possible out of such a tale. No; we must act merely by means of moral suasion, you and I and Miss O'Malachy."

"Miss O'Malachy? The girl?" gasped M. Drakovics.
"Exactly—the young lady. You are a very clever man, M. Drakovics, but you have not had the advantage of spending a year in the British Embassy at Pavelsburg, and making an exhaustive study of Scythian

society ladies. I know well enough the Cercle Évangélique in which Miss O'Malachy was brought up—not that it is in favour in high quarters, quite the contrary; but I was interested in it out of curiosity. Its members may be called fanatics—they certainly are not worldly-wise—and I am pretty sure that Princess Soudaroff has made her god-daughter as great an enthusiast as she is herself. Now you will see why I am ready to lay aside in her case the usual rule of considering every one a knave until he or she is proved otherwise, and why I expect her to do our business for us."

"But how?"

"I will lay the case before her, and point out that Caerleon will ruin his cause and jeopardise his crown if he marries her. Then she will refuse him for his own sake."

"Impossible, milord! Refuse a crown?"

"For his sake, I tell you. That's what the girl is like. Well, will you leave it to me? If I fail, after fair trial, I give you full leave to break off the match in your own way."

"I agree, milord, though I cannot believe you will succeed. No woman on earth would decline a crown, to be shared with the man whom, according to you, she loves passionately. But you shall try. By all means, milord, we work together, if you please."

"I thought so," laughed Cyril to himself, as M. Drakovics went out.

A little later, he saw from the balcony the O'Malachys' travelling-carriage coming round to the door, and watched while the family took their places in it. Madame O'Malachy, gracious and graceful as ever, was nodding pleasantly to the landlady as the luggage was put up, and her husband was cracking a joke with the

travelled waiter, through whom all communications with the authorities of the inn were obliged to be conducted. Louis, surly and unapproachable as usual, took his seat in the carriage without a word, and Nadia was equally silent as she sat upright by her mother's side, her face covered with a thick veil, which aroused Cyril's suspicions instantly.

"She has been crying," he said. "What a pity her complexion isn't like her mother's, for a little powder and paint would put it all right in that case. What Caerleon can see in her I cannot imagine."

In spite of his antipathy to the O'Malachys, he kept his place on the balcony and waved a farewell to the travellers, watching the carriage as it wound round the curves of the rough mountain road until it was finally out of sight, when he went back into the coffee-room to join Caerleon and M. Drakovics, who were discussing the question of the costume in which the new King was to make the journey to his capital. Evening dress and a tall hat formed M. Drakovics's idea of the clothes suitable to the occasion; but Wright, who was assisting uninvited at the discussion, and who bore a grudge already against the Premier for inducing Caerleon to remain in Thracia, flatly declined to "make a tomfool" of his master by helping him to don a swallow-tail coat in the daytime. Caerleon himself thought it would be the proper thing to adopt the Thracian national dress, as a delicate compliment to the people; but M. Drakovics objected to this on the ground that the Thracians were expecting an Englishman, and would be disappointed if they found him dressed like themselves.

"Will your Majesty not wear your uniform?" he asked, offering another suggestion in his turn. "That of your Volunteer cavalry, I mean?"

"My Yeomanry uniform?" said Caerleon. "I haven't got it here. In fact, I should have no right to wear it any longer if I had, for I resigned my commission before I left home, because the expenses connected with the troop were too much for me to meet in my present circumstances."

"But your uniform's 'ere, all the same, my lord," said Wright. "If your lordship remembers, it was sent on with the 'eavy luggage before the troop was decided to be given up, in case there was any grand doin's while, your lordship were at the castle," and he nodded vaguely in the direction which he imagined to be that of Château Temeszy.

"Oh, well, if you've got it, you may as well wear it, Caerleon," said Cyril. "It's only a cast-off now, after all, and if Ceylon coolies and African chiefs are allowed to sport discarded British uniforms, I don't see why the King of Thracia shouldn't."

"Your comparisons are not exactly flattering to Thracia," said Caerleon, "and I don't think it's quite the thing to sport the old uniform under the circumstances. Ordinary riding-togs are the best thing for a long ride like this, and if it's absolutely necessary, one can add a top hat and a black coat before entering Bellaviste;" and to this decision he adhered, in spite of the Premier's remonstrances and of Cyril's jeers.

It had been arranged that the King and his companions were to ride the greater part of the way to Bellaviste, escorted by the Thracians who had accompanied M. Drakovics, and most of whom had brought horses with them; for although a railway from the frontier to the capital was nearly completed, it had not yet been opened for passenger traffic. It was a picturesque procession which wound down the mountain-

side, headed by Caerleon and M. Drakovics ; but when the level ground was reached the symmetry of the march was much disturbed, for the younger men among the Thracians broke the line out of pure gladness, racing their horses against one another, and riding hither and thither on either side of the main body. Whenever a village was reached, the inhabitants were summoned to the church by the ringing of the bell, and Caerleon, standing on the steps, was proclaimed king by M. Drakovics. Everywhere the people poured forth in delight to meet the party, bringing offerings of bread and salt, which were to be touched by the King and afterwards consumed by the givers.

On these occasions Cyril generally remained in the background, afraid of being caught laughing, as he told M. Drakovics, to the no small indignation of the Premier. Wright shared his objection to publicity, but for a different reason, feeling very uneasy in his mind as to the whole proceeding, now that he understood its import, and not at all sure that it was consistent with his duty to Queen Victoria to become a subject of Caerleon. There was an unhappy consciousness that something was wrong about his whole aspect, which would have afforded Cyril infinite amusement at any other time ; but now, as from his commanding position on horseback he watched his brother's close-cropped fair head towering above the unkempt locks of his new subjects, he was busy trying to enter into the feelings of the Thracians. Mothers brought their children to look at Caerleon, for good luck, as they said, "that their eyes might see the King's face" ; old men came tottering up to touch his coat or his riding-whip, and to call down blessings on his head. It was all too absurdly medieval, thought Cyril, as the office-bearers

of the little towns came hurrying to take the oath of allegiance to their new King, and the peasants crowded round to entreat him to raise an army to conquer Scythia, in which every man of them would enlist. Why should they make all this fuss about an unimaginative Englishman, who merely looked uncomfortable when a more than usually fervent assurance of devotion was translated to him, and who could say nothing in return but that he would try to do his best for the people and the country? There could be no idea of Divine Right in this case, for how could such a sentiment consist with the popular election of the monarch? and as for loyalty, how could they feel loyalty to a man of whom they knew nothing but that he was an English prince, for whom M. Drakovics vouched as a suitable candidate for the throne? Cyril decided at last that they regarded Caerleon as the incarnation of the spirit of the late revolution, and as a bulwark against Scythia and the return of the House of Franza; but the Thracians themselves would probably have explained their delight much more simply by saying that they had a king at last, that he was young, good-looking, and fair-haired, and that he spoke courteously and looked like a soldier.

After three days spent in this kind of travelling the party came in sight of Bellaviste, and here they were met by what M. Drakovics called the "Sacred Band," but which was known to military critics as the crack regiment of the Thracian army. It had been recruited on the classical principle, the men being divided into little groups of five or ten, all hailing from the same village, while in the same way each company represented a district, and each battalion a province.

"This regiment, your Majesty," said M. Drakovics,

as he presented the officers to Caerleon, "is the backbone of your army. Representative, from its composition, of the whole nation, it was the first to declare for freedom, and when it had done so, the doom of the House of Franzia was sealed. I can assure you that the Sacred Band, to which, with your gracious permission, I will from to-day grant the honour of calling itself the Carlino Regiment, will prove to be the bulwark of your throne."

The grant of its new name was received with great enthusiasm by the regiment, which was formed up for inspection, and when this ceremony was over, proceeded to escort the King into his capital. M. Drakovics, riding as usual beside his sovereign, pointed out the chief features of interest on the road. The city of Bellaviste itself was situated on a hill, which rose steeply from the river, but fell away gradually on the other sides. The highest portion of the hill was occupied by the palace, which with its gardens was surrounded by a strong wall capable of defence against a foe unprovided with artillery. Below this, on three sides, the houses of the town covered the slopes as far as the lowlands, while a broad rampart ran round the whole, set with towers at intervals.

"That is all our work since the revolution," said M. Drakovics, pointing to this rampart with pride. "Under the Franzas, the money voted for fortifications was all spent on excavating and arming useless batteries along the river-front, which no foe would think of attacking, while the town was left defenceless."

"I don't think you are giving King Peter the credit he deserves," said Cyril. "If his batteries on the river-face are well placed, he ought to be able to command the whole channel, and his position would be most

important in view of a European war. Matters would be very much in his hands, for unless he chose, the Pannonian gunboats could not get out to sea, nor could the Scythian war-ships get up the river. The great danger would be that he might find himself taken in the rear. I suppose he meant to see to that when he had finished his batteries."

"Our views were not so exalted, milord," said M. Drakovics. "Safety was our great consideration, and when we were free our first thought was to erect a wall, which, if it could not stand against modern artillery, would at any rate serve to resist any insurrectionary force."

"And to whom is the defence of the wall intrusted?" asked Caerleon. "To the Sacred Band?"

"No, indeed," answered the Premier. "Their barracks are two miles away from the city, on that farther hill. The people were afraid that if their king had a regiment at his command in Bellaviste, he might use it to overthrow the constitution. The city is garrisoned by the city guard, which is entirely composed of young men belonging to Bellaviste families. One company of this forms the palace guard, with a very elaborate uniform and special rights. It was the favourite corps of King Peter Franz, and we scarcely expected that its members would be willing to fall in with the new state of things, particularly when we were forced to deprive them of some of their privileges. But the officers are all staunch—we took care of that."

"Did your care extend to giving the palace guard as many occasions of discontent as possible?" asked Cyril. "You owed the success of your revolution to the co-operation of the army, and the army must be very dense if it has not learnt the lesson. What you

will have to guard against in the future is a military revolt, and it sounds to the uninitiated as though you were carefully working one up."

"We were obliged to deprive the guard as far as possible of its power of mischief, milord. In its former state it was a standing menace, but under its present officers it is excellently affected to the Government."

At the gate of the city the Sacred Band handed over its escort duties to the guard, which was paraded for the King's inspection, after which all the troops fell in for the march through the streets. The houses were gaily decorated, and the windows and roofs crowded with people, who welcomed Caerleon with shouts of joy. It was still early in the day, and M. Drakovics had arranged a programme of events. Orders had been sent forward to prepare for the coronation; but it was found impossible to complete the arrangements before the morrow, and all that could be done on this occasion was to visit the hall of the Assembly, in order to receive the loyal addresses of the Legislative body, and their oath of allegiance. Then followed the reception of addresses from the municipality of Bellaviste, and as many other local authorities as had been able to get them ready in time; after which came lunch at the Hôtel de Ville, and a state progress through the town. Further receptions followed this, and the events of the day concluded with a parade of the palace guard in the courtyard of the palace. It needed all M. Drakovics's powers of persuasion to induce his sovereign to conduct a third inspection after his round of duties; but he represented so forcibly the disappointment which would be felt in the city if any slight were offered to the guard, that Caerleon yielded. They were a fine body of men, wearing a very handsome, if somewhat foppish,

uniform, and their officers were seasoned old soldiers, whose aspect presented a curious contrast to that of the rank and file. One more speech, translated by M. Drakovics, was necessary here, and this duty performed, Caerleon entered his palace with a sigh of relief. Owing to the delay in the coronation arrangements, which included a state banquet, no special function had been fixed for that evening, except that the town was to be illuminated later on; and although M. Drakovics would have liked to linger at the palace and talk international politics, Caerleon's disinclination for further conversation on the subject was so extremely pronounced that he found it impossible to remain, and the brothers were left alone together.

"Call this being king?" said Caerleon, when he and Cyril met at dinner in the comparatively small room which they had chosen out of the wilderness of state apartments as their dining-room when by themselves, for there were few regular court officials at present. The chief functionaries had all gone into exile with the late king, and it had not been possible to appoint their successors as yet, so that matters were in the hands of such of the less important officials as had adopted the cause of the revolution. These had not yet acquired the reverential obtuseness which would have enabled those whose places they had taken to maintain their position about the king as long as etiquette required, in spite of his disinclination for their society. Accordingly they effaced themselves obediently when their sovereign intimated that their attendance was not further desired that night, and it did not strike Caerleon that even the freedom he now enjoyed would have been impossible in a properly constituted court. "I call it being a slave, no less," he went on. "What a

luxurious beast old Franza must have been ! I never saw anything like the rooms up-stairs. Well, if luxury could compensate him for all the bother and fuss, he deserved it."

" 'Uneasy lies the head——'" began Cyril.

" Oh, shut up, and don't quote moral platitudes," said Caerleon, wearily. " I tell you what, Cyril, there are two things we'll do. We'll look out some attic place where we can smoke in peace, with two chairs in it and a rug on the floor, and we will break through that absurd rule of never going out without an escort. I mean to do the Haroun-al-Raschid business, and poke about a little *incog.*"

" All right," said Cyril; " I'll be Grand Vizier. We will get hold of a couple of fur.caps and these Thracian cloaks with high fur collars, and have some fun. Shall we begin to-night with the illuminations, or are you fagged out ? "

" I don't see why we shouldn't," said Caerleon. " Root out some cloaks, will you ? There are servants enough, and it's a charity to give them something to do. It'll be all right if we are in by eleven o'clock, when some of those chaps from the town are coming to serenade us."

Through the medium of Wright, who was preparing very reluctantly to resign the care of his master's personal belongings into the hands of the new servants and return to his natural sphere, the charge of the stables, Cyril procured the required disguises, and he and his brother wrapped themselves up and slipped out. The palace was built round a square courtyard, in the midst of which stood the rude little chapel of St Peter, where the workmen had been busied all day in making preparations for the coronation. As the ser-

vants were all at supper, and the guards in their own hall, only the sentries were to be seen, and Caerleon and Cyril stole along in the shadow, giving the password when it was demanded, and reaching the gardens in safety. A private gate, to which they alone possessed a key, supplied them with the means of exit, and they descended the steep street and mingled with the crowd which was admiring the illuminations. These were more ambitious than successful, and although the Thracians were full of delight, Cyril turned up his nose at the display, and commented on it in disparaging whispers.

"It is rather slow here," said Caerleon, stopping short suddenly. "Let us go and look up the O'Malachys."

It was in Cyril's mind to say, "I wondered how soon you would get to that," but he held his tongue, and followed Caerleon to the Hôtel Occidental, the whereabouts of which the King had discovered in the course of his progress through the town. Keeping their cloaks well up to their faces, they passed through the hall without being recognised, and were conducted up-stairs to the O'Malachys' sitting-room, where they found the Herr Oberst himself, Louis, and Nadia. Madame O'Malachy was suffering from a bad headache, and had gone early to her room.

"Indeed and 'tis very condescending in your Majesty to come and see us like this," said the O'Malachy, when he had apologised for his wife's absence. "Sure 'twas only an hour ago I was saying to Louie here, 'What will we do about paying our respects to the King? Will we call upon um, or wait until he sends for us?' And we couldn't make up our minds about ut at all."

"That's not true," said Cyril to himself. "I'm pretty sure you decided to wait until Caerleon came

and looked you up, which you guessed he would do before long."

"For pity's sake," said Caerleon, sinking into the chair which Louis pushed towards him, "leave the kingdom alone for a little while, O'Malachy. I am sick to death of it. Here, at any rate, let me have a little respite."

"As you please," said the O'Malachy, with a gracious wave of the hand. "I suppose a king may take a holiday like other people if he wants ut. You will find Liberty Hall here, whenever you like to look in."

Caerleon sighed contentedly, and leaned back in his chair. The room looked comfortable and home-like, very different from the gorgeous solitudes at the palace. The O'Malachy, white-haired and soldierly, with a sly twinkle in his eye, was the picture of a courteous host. Nadia sat close by, under the light, with her work; and Louis, buried in a Bellaviste weekly journal, seemed less out of harmony with his surroundings than usual. The place was a haven of rest. But rest in itself was not sufficient for complete happiness, and Caerleon's state of contentment did not last long. Cyril, watching from the background, was no better pleased. Before the evening was over, he had lost patience altogether with Nadia. Why did she sit there stiffly, in the full blaze of the electric light, working with unremitting assiduity at some coarse and unlovely garment for the poor, and refusing to answer any remark except in monosyllables? She would not take Caerleon into the conservatory to show him the flowers, as he asked her, nor did she respond to her father's suggestion that she should point out to him the view from the balcony. There she sat, never looking up, sewing away as if for dear life, and acting as an effectual damper on the con-

versation of the rest, while Cyril was longing for a smoke with Louis and his father, and one or two of the latter's stories, which were not altogether suited for ladies' ears. All that Caerleon wanted was to be left alone with her, but she succeeded in baffling all his efforts, and Cyril waxed furious over her foolishness. Did she really imagine that by dint of coyness and coldness she could keep her lover from making her an open avowal of his feelings? Surely she must know that he would insist upon a plain answer, and that it would be impossible to put him off for ever? Caerleon would hear her decision from her own lips at one time or another, and the sooner she dismissed him and bade him turn his mind to other subjects the better.

These thoughts were seething in Cyril's brain all the evening; but Nadia remained unconscious of their import and as immovable as before. The only time she exhibited any animation was when the brothers rose to go.

"You have not seen much of this place yet," she said to Caerleon as he bade her good-night, "but I have gone about a good deal yesterday and to-day. There is plenty for you to do. The drunkenness is awful. You have before you as much work as you can wish."

A chuckle from Louis followed her eager speech, and Caerleon had no opportunity to say more than that he would give his best attention to the matter, before Cyril hurried him away. They passed through the streets almost in silence, reached the palace without attracting notice, and after enduring patiently a long performance from the town band, went to bed.

CHAPTER VII.

C H E C K .

"I FEEL I've about earned my night's repose," yawned Cyril to himself in the solitude of his own room. "If all the Thracians have worked as hard to-day as their king and his brother, they're an industrious nation. Hullo! some of them must be at it still. I suppose old Drakovics has been hurrying them, for fear things won't be ready for the coronation."

His eye had caught a faint glimmer in the eastern windows of St Peter's chapel, which could hardly be the effect of moonlight, and as he lay down he congratulated himself that he was not obliged to work all through the night at putting up decorations. For an hour or so he slept the sleep of the weary; then he was aroused by shouts and cries pealing through the palace.

"Another revolution!" was his first thought, as he jumped out of bed and groped for his revolver; but as soon as he threw back the window-curtains, a flood of light poured into the room. The chapel of St Peter was blazing furiously, and the courtyard was full of guards and servants, some staring stupidly at the flames, others tumbling over one another in eager but

ineffectual efforts to take measures for stopping the fire.

"Put on some clothes and come out, Cyril," said Caerleon's voice at the door. "Those idiots there haven't an idea what to do."

Hastily obeying, Cyril found himself placed at the head of a band of water-carriers, while Caerleon took his stand close to the burning pile, and directed the throwing of the water as the buckets were passed from hand to hand. There were proper appliances all over the palace for use in case of an outbreak of fire, but the buckets were rusted into holes and the hoses were leaky; and if Wright had not organised from among the onlookers a force to fetch pails from the stables, it would have been impossible to procure a sufficient quantity of water. Even as it was, the flames were not finally vanquished until the roof and walls of the building had fallen in, and the morning light showed only a heap of smoking ruins. St Peter's chapel was a total wreck, and the crown and other regalia of Thracia were buried under the *débris*.

When the fire had been practically extinguished, Cyril returned to his room, but not to sleep, for his mind was occupied with a very pertinent question,—What was the cause of the conflagration? To most of the household at the palace, the answer appeared obvious. Of course the men at work in the chapel must have dropped some sparks on the woodwork or the draperies, or have left a candle burning close to them. The sentry at the door had noticed nothing until his comrade at the opposite side of the courtyard, who could see the windows, had remarked that the workmen must be burning candles enough to light the whole of Thracia. Astonished to hear this, since he

knew that all the workmen had gone home some hours before, the sentry had at once alarmed the guard, and the officer in charge procured the chapel key and opened the door. The place was already a mass of flame within, and the fire gained additional strength immediately, owing to the rush of air from the doorway, and burst forth from the windows. The guard raised the alarm at once, but nothing effectual had been done to extinguish the flames until Caerleon took command of the amateur firemen, and his help came too late to be of service. Over all these details Cyril pondered as he lay in bed. It seemed to him almost impossible that the fire should have been accidental, for its sudden outbreak and great strength alike appeared to point to its having been caused intentionally. Moreover, the time at which it occurred was a most fortunate one for the Scythian party in the State, for it was certain that the coronation must now be postponed, if only for a day. But if the conflagration were the result of a plot, where was the incendiary to be sought? Was he a traitor in the household, or a Scythian emissary who had passed himself off as one of the workmen? Cyril went downstairs in the morning with his mind full of questions of this nature, and in the breakfast-room he found M. Drakovics, who was overflowing with the information he had already gained.

Immediately on hearing of the fire, the Premier had sent to arrest forthwith all the workmen who had been employed on the decoration of the chapel; and they had already been interrogated, with the result that it seemed certain that none of their number was the culprit. The antecedents of all of them were well known and satisfactory, and the contractor was able to

show that he had purposely employed none but strong Carlinists on the work. The men were certain that they had left no lights behind them in the chapel, with the exception of the lamps always kept burning before the sacred pictures, and they venerated the place far too highly to smoke there, so that the question of sparks was disposed of.

"Now," said M. Drakovics, triumphantly, "we have proved who did not cause the fire; but beyond that, I am in a position to inform your Majesty that the miscreant was undoubtedly an emissary of Scythia, and was either a woman or a man in women's clothes."

"If you can prove that already, your police must beat ours hollow," said Caerleon. "Let us hear about it."

"In the first place, your Majesty, I have been examining the ruins, with the aid of a detachment of sappers. We were searching for the crown jewels—which are now, alas! shapeless lumps of metal, their precious stones for the most part calcined—and we found distinct traces of petroleum in more than one spot. Does not that fact speak for itself? Petroleum is never used in lighting the chapel, and it is a favourite weapon of incendiaries. Upon making this discovery, I proceeded to interrogate the guard, who were all under arrest. Those who were posted at the gates last night were unanimous in declaring that no unauthorised person had passed in after the workmen had departed, with the exception of one woman, who said that she was the mother of one of the decorators employed, and that her son had left behind him his book of gold-leaf, which she had come to fetch. The sentries describe her as very old and bent, but with piercing dark eyes,—and wearing the dress of the

respectable artisan class. The acting master of the household had not yet locked the chapel doors, and the woman was therefore allowed to go in and look for the book, which took her some time to find. She came out with it in her hand, and the door was immediately locked. The theory is that she carried in with her a supply of petroleum in a can——”

“Or perhaps in bladders hung round her waist, as brandy used to be smuggled into England,” put in Cyril, who had been following the details with much interest.

M. Drakovics bowed. “Very possibly, milord. Having saturated the woodwork behind the screen of the sanctuary with the oil, she would arrange a slow match which would not come in contact with it for some hours, and would then take her departure, provided with a book of gold-leaf to deceive the guard. The master of the household, looking in from the doorway, would notice nothing, and would lock the door and take away the key, leaving the match to do its work.”

“But why may not the culprit be the woman she gave herself out to be?” asked Caerleon.

“Because, your Majesty, the woman’s son and the other members of her family are all able to swear that from nine to ten o’clock, the hour at which the incendiary did her work, Nicola Stanovics’s mother was engaged in a violent quarrel with her daughter-in-law, who had left her infant at home while she went out to see the illuminations. The old woman met her at the door as she returned, and their dispute almost ended in blows. Moreover, the guard, when confronted with Marynia Stanovics, declared without hesitation that she was not the woman whom they had admitted.”

"Well, that seems to clear the old lady, at any rate," said Caerleon. "Your work has been most successful in a negative direction. Have you any positive clue to go upon?"

It did not appear that M. Drakovics as yet possessed anything of the kind, although he was willing to detail the various theories which had been formed on the subject, but Cyril did not listen. His mind was occupied with a hypothesis of his own, the foundation fact of which was Madame O'Malachy's headache of the evening before. Again and again he went through the details, for his suspicions at first seemed preposterous, but the more he thought over the matter, the more likely did it appear that Madame O'Malachy had slipped out of doors in disguise, carrying with her the necessary supply of petroleum, and successfully effected the firing of the chapel. His visit to the hotel with Caerleon had given him the means of reaching this conclusion, inasmuch as if they had not happened to call no one would have known that Madame O'Malachy was not spending the evening hours in the society of her family. The plot must have been maturing for some time, since both the disguise and the petroleum would be difficult to procure in Bellaviste without exciting suspicion, and it could not be doubted that its object was to delay the coronation,—although whether the lady had done her work in pursuance of orders from her Scythian employers, or with an eye to her daughter's future, Cyril found himself unable to determine. It was not difficult to guess that she was playing a double game, and that whereas she had been commissioned to use every possible means to prevent Caerleon's ascending the Thracian throne, she was not unwilling to assist him in establishing himself there,

provided that her daughter shared his elevation. To pursue at the same time two lines of policy so diametrically opposed to one another might well need almost superhuman skill, and it appeared evident to Cyril that for the sake of placing her good faith to her employers beyond suspicion, Madame O'Malachy had taken a step so desperate that it bade fair to ruin her private schemes. Had he but overheard his brother's parting conversation with her at Witska, he might have discovered that she had not yet found the problem of serving two masters an insoluble one. In spite of his ignorance of this factor in the case, however, he was filled with a lively admiration for both her resolution and her daring.

"What an actress the woman must be!" he said to himself. "What pluck, what nerve she has! But this sort of thing won't do. She will think nothing of dynamiting us before long, if this is the way she begins. We shall be obliged to take a hostage from her. She doesn't care a scrap for the girl; but if Louis, for whom she does seem to have a little natural affection, were safely installed here, she would think twice before blowing us up. I must get that settled."

"There is one thing that makes me feel less regret than I should otherwise have done for the postponement of the coronation," M. Drakovics was saying. "I have received this morning a despatch in cipher from my agent at Czarigrad, saying that he finds the Roumi Government far more favourably disposed towards Thracia and your Majesty than we could have dared to hope. He has even received a hint from a very high quarter to the effect that if we could put off the coronation for a certain length of time, so as to avoid anything that might have the appearance of a desire to

force the hand of the Grand Signior, our right as a nation to choose our own sovereign would before very long be recognised. That would strengthen our position in Europe enormously. If Roum recognises us, Scythia can do little."

"But Scythia will in the meantime bring pressure on Roum to refuse to recognise us," said Cyril. "Surely you are losing a great opportunity for the chance of grasping at a shadow. Is it decided that the coronation shall be postponed?"

"What else can we do?" asked M. Drakovics. "The King must be crowned in St Peter's chapel, and with the crown of Alexander the Patriot. The chapel is in ruins, the crown a mere lump of metal, and both must be restored before they can be used."

"But this is madness!" cried Cyril. "Do you intend to wait for the chapel to be rebuilt? It will probably take months. After all, when it is restored, it won't be the old chapel, so why not have the coronation somewhere else at once?"

"Because you are not acquainted with our people, milord," was the studiously mild reply of M. Drakovics. "They would not recognise any king not crowned on that spot, and with that crown. Moreover, in an emergency like the present, when our actions are certain to be jealously scrutinised in order to discover the least flaw in the legality of our proceedings, we must be doubly careful to do everything in the very strictest order."

"Then why not clear away the ruins and hold the ceremony in the open air, or in a tent pitched on the site of the chapel?" cried Cyril. "There must be jewellers in Bellaviste, who would not take more than a day to knock together out of your lump of gold some-

thing sufficiently like a crown for all practical purposes. Take my word for it, M. Drakovics, if we lose the day finally, it will be owing to delay now."

" You must allow me to differ from you, milord," was the answer. " In my opinion, the day is far more likely to be lost through undue precipitation. But after all, the matter is entirely in his Majesty's hands. Is it your wish, sir, that the coronation should take place immediately or not ? "

" Well," said Caerleon, " you ought to know best,—and naturally it would be a very good thing to begin the reign with full recognition from Roum."

" Your reign has begun," said Cyril. " The coronation only puts a seal upon it, half-sentimental, half-religious."

" Still," said Caerleon, " we are not the best judges, Cyril. If M. Drakovics, who is better acquainted with Thracia than we are, thinks that it will be more serviceable to the country to delay the coronation, I have no objection."

" That's all very well," thought Cyril. " You are calculating that in a month or two you ought to be able to break down Miss O'Malachy's scruples. I am sorry to be under the painful necessity of putting a spoke in your wheel, my dear fellow."

" If your Majesty is pleased to delay the coronation," said M. Drakovics, " may I ask you to visit the Hôtel de Ville with me this morning ? The people have been gathering together from all the country round to witness the ceremony, and it will be necessary to explain to them what has occurred. There is another thing I was anxious to know. Your Majesty mentioned a few days ago that your brother had some idea of offering himself as your private secretary. I see that corre-

spondence is already beginning to pour in, and as the office is a very delicate and important one, I venture to ask whether Milord Cyril is still in the same mind?"

"M. Drakovics means me to earn my board and lodging," said Cyril, who was conscious of a grudge against the statesman for rejecting his counsel.

"I am quite sure that M. Drakovics means nothing of the kind," said Caerleon, sharply. "He knows very well that you are here as my guest."

"As the guest of the nation, if I may be permitted to correct your Majesty," said M. Drakovics. "Thracia owes far too much to your family not to desire to see as many of its members as possible. My reason for asking this question to-day is that Milord Cyril has displayed such a talent for diplomacy that I am anxious not to lose his co-operation in the work I have in hand at present. His one fault is that, like all young diplomats, he wishes to begin, as you say in England, at the top of the tree, and in this he does himself an injustice, for his forte lies rather in working in combination with others than in isolated action, if he will allow me to say so."

"Well, Cyril, the bitter pill is pretty well gilded," said Caerleon, laughing. "What do you say? Will you take the situation?"

"I suppose I should have to read all your letters," said Cyril. "That sounds fairly interesting. Then I should have to write the answers—not quite so delightful, but still passable. Yes; I'll take it."

"If your Majesty will permit me, I will give Milord Cyril a few hints as to the duties of this new position," said M. Drakovics.

"Very well," returned Caerleon. "I am going to stroll round to the stables, Cyril. When your initiation is complete, you'll find me there."

"Now," said Cyril, closing the door on his brother, and turning to M. Drakovics, "I want to know what you expect to gain by putting off the coronation in this way. You are giving the Scythians and their sympathisers a gratuitous triumph, and losing time, which is of inestimable value. If you have a reason, why keep it a secret?"

"I have a reason, milord," answered M. Drakovics. "That my opinion does not accord with yours is a matter for regret; but I hope that it will not be anything more. I am deeply anxious that you should remain at Bellaviste, for I need your help."

"Oh, I suppose I may as well stay here and take Caerleon's body home when you have got him shot as a filibuster by a Scythian force sent to restore order," said Cyril.

"You are pleased to be sarcastic, milord," said M. Drakovics. "Without in the least allowing that the calamity which you prophesy is likely to occur, I would ask you to remember that the cause is more important than the man. If Roum recognises our choice of a king, our future position as a free nation is unassailable, and we are justified in the sight of Europe. If your brother is crowned king at once, we are merely, under present circumstances, a vassal State which has rebelled, and elected its own ruler. No one could be more grateful to his Majesty for accepting the crown than I am, but Thracia must come first."

"I see," said Cyril; "your business is to take care of Thracia. Very well, be it so; mine will be to take care of Caerleon. The kingdom will only be a secondary thing with me, as part of Caerleon's property."

"Then I hope, milord, that you will prove your care by persuading his Majesty to exercise greater prudence

than you both showed last night. To walk through the streets alone, and in disguise, in the midst of crowds of strangers, to the lodging of a family of Scythian spies, where the merest trifle—an accident with a pistol, a drop of poison in a cup of coffee—might have effected the utmost that Scythia could desire, can scarcely be called wise."

"Well, if you had your eye on us all the time we ought to have been fairly safe," said Cyril, angry but taken aback.

"You surely do not imagine that I should allow the King to risk his life so rashly without taking precautions to ensure his safety?" said M. Drakovics. "You were followed the whole way by one of my most trusted agents in the Police, a man whom you will do well always to order to accompany you if his Majesty chooses to go out again *incognito*. You had no idea that you were tracked, but he never lost sight of you."

"Until we reached the hotel, I suppose?" said Cyril.

"On the contrary, you were never more carefully watched than during your visit there. Ever since Colonel O'Malachy and his wife arrived in Bellaviste, a police agent in a room on the opposite side of the street has kept them under constant surveillance by means of mirrors ingeniously placed at different angles, so that you were in full view during the whole time you spent in their *salon*."

"But what is the object of all this police shadowing?" asked Cyril, rather disgusted.

"To avert mischief," returned M. Drakovics. "And although we did not succeed in preventing the burning of the chapel, yet we have discovered its author. Perhaps you would be surprised to hear how Madame O'Malachy was employed during the time of your visit last night?"

"On the contrary," said Cyril in his turn; "I am flattered to find that you have come to the same conclusion as myself. She was burning the chapel."

M. Drakovics was a little disconcerted. "I congratulate you on the soundness of your instincts, milord," he said.

"But why did you not prevent the fire, if you knew of it beforehand?" asked Cyril.

"Unfortunately, milord, my agent was so much occupied in watching his Majesty and yourself, that he failed to observe Madame O'Malachy leaving the hotel, and only saw her return. It was not until he heard the evidence of the sentries that he divined what her errand had been. But perhaps you will now agree with me in my estimate of the O'Malachy family?"

"By the bye," said Cyril, quickly, "what did you mean just now by saying that you needed my help?"

"It was on the subject of his Majesty's marriage," said M. Drakovics, looking rather confused. "This morning, before you came in, I ventured to suggest to the King the advisability of his consolidating his position by an alliance with some lady belonging to a royal house, but he refused to allow me to say anything on the subject."

"It's just what I told you!" cried Cyril. "Englishmen are not accustomed to have their marriages arranged for them, and Caerleon is the very last man to stand it. Now, M. Drakovics, I thought this matter was to be left to me. Am I to have a free hand or not? If I am to be interfered with, I will have nothing to do with it."

"If you can guarantee a successful result, milord, I shall be most happy to leave it to you," returned M. Drakovics.

"Because," continued Cyril, "you are making exactly the same mistake as Miss O'Malachy. I believe she thinks that she can tire Caerleon out by snubbing him, and you intend to make use of the information you have gained, by dint of spying on her mother, to terrify the whole family into leaving the kingdom. Miss O'Malachy is as anxious to be out of Thracia as you are to get her out; but you had better not put that beautiful plan of yours into execution unless you want Caerleon to go after her. He will have his answer, and if you leave things to me I will arrange that he shall have it soon, so that the affair may be over."

"You seem very certain of success, milord."

"If I am to succeed, I must be absolutely free. The first thing to be done is to give Lieutenant O'Malachy a commission in the palace guard."

"And why, milord?"

"To keep him out of mischief, and to prevent his mother's perceiving that we have discovered her little game. This is my test of the extent of your confidence in me, monsieur. Is it to be accepted?"

"It shall be," returned M. Drakovics, after a severe mental struggle. "The matter is so important that it is worth even a dangerous experiment."

When his protracted interview with M. Drakovics was over and Cyril went in search of Caerleon, his first words on finding him were to suggest that it would be a graceful recognition of the sacrifices Louis O'Malachy had made in the cause of Thracia to appoint him at once to a lieutenancy in the palace guard, thus showing him special favour by placing him close to the sovereign's own person. Caerleon looked surprised.

"I think it's a very good idea," he said; "but you

have always been so suspicious of the poor fellow's motives that I should not have expected you to propose it. I will have the commission made out at once. And as we are now on the subject of the O'Malachy family, I may as well remind you of something of which Drakovics apparently is not aware. He attacked me this morning about marrying; but you know, if he doesn't, that I intend to marry Miss O'Malachy, and no one else."

"I never imagined that you wanted to imitate the Grand Signior of Roum, and marry twenty or thirty ladies at once," said Cyril; but seeing Caerleon's face darken, he added hastily, "I beg your pardon, old man. I was only joking. Do you intend to make formal proposals at once to papa for the hand of mademoiselle?"

"Not yet," said Caerleon. "You see," he went on quickly, as if it was a relief to unburden himself to his brother, "I can't tell a bit how she'll take it. She has never given me the least encouragement, and last night she scarcely spoke to me. Unfortunately, I can't help guessing that the kingdom would weigh pretty heavily with her parents in my favour, and I don't want the poor girl worried into marrying me, nor her life made a burden to her because she won't. Madame O'Malachy has promised me her support; but though it sounds a little ungrateful, I would rather manage the business without her interference."

"I don't think any amount of worrying would make Miss O'Malachy do a thing she had made up her mind not to do," said Cyril. "But seriously, Caerleon, I can't believe she means to marry you. She gave you the cold shoulder pointedly enough last night. Can't you chuck up the business, old man? I don't imagine you care for her very particularly."

"Don't you?" asked Caerleon, looking down on him with a smile. "My dear boy, you are very young still."

"If you mean to insinuate that I haven't had twice as much experience in affairs of the kind as you have," began Cyril, with a great show of indignation, "I'll——"

"I daresay—ten times as much. That accounts for your ignorance."

"Well, don't look so horribly superior. It's awfully riling for the other fellow, don't you know? Now, look here, you leave this thing to me, and I'll do you a good turn. You want to find out the state of Miss O'Malachy's feelings before approaching her father. I'll manage to get you a chance of speaking to her alone."

"Thanks, but I think I can look after my own opportunities."

"No, you can't; not as king, with Drakovics and his spies always prowling about after you. Do you know that we had a fellow shadowing us last night?"

"Yes, I felt sure at the time that we were being dogged."

"But why didn't you say so?"

"I didn't want to make you nervous."

"Stuff!" cried Cyril, ungratefully. "You were afraid I should consider it wiser to give up the expedition and go back. Keep your thoughtfulness for Miss O'Malachy in future. After that piece of cheek, you don't deserve a good turn, but I will mention that I am going down to the O'Malachys' this morning to tell them about dear Louie's commission. Shall I take any message from you?"

"I'll come too," said Caerleon, promptly.

"No, you won't. You are due at the Hôtel de Ville,

to hear old Drakovics spout from the balcony. It would be 'Hamlet' with Hamlet left out if you weren't there. Well, shall I take her a bouquet in your name? No, that would be too pronounced—might be regarded by the family as a declaration. Shall I say anything to her for you?"

"Yes; you can say that I mean to begin this very day the inquiry she suggested to me."

"All right; nothing like setting to work at once. Now, off you go to uniform and duty. I am the best off this morning."

Sauntering down to the hotel, Cyril came upon Louis and his father in the hall, waiting impatiently for Madame O'Malachy, who was going with them to hear the speeches in the market-place. Going up-stairs, he found Nadia in the sitting-room, arranging the flowers for the table, carefully and conscientiously, as she did everything, adding a spray here, and taking one away there, and holding up the vase to see the effect, then lifting everything out and beginning again.

Before her stood a glass in which her mother had placed carelessly two or three blossoms and a spray or two of feathery fern, which seemed to have arranged themselves, but of which the effect was perfect. By the table stood Madame O'Malachy, buttoning her long gloves and criticising freely her daughter's work.

"You have no taste, Nadia. Surely it must be evident, even to you, that a brick is not the best model for a bouquet? Don't pull the flowers about so much; you will ruin them, and I cannot afford any more to-day."

"I am commissioned to say that the hothouses at the palace are at your disposal, madame, if you would honour my brother by allowing him to send you some flowers," said Cyril, coming forward.

"His Majesty's conduct is angelic," returned Madame O'Malachy. "But of what use are all the flowers in Thracia if the artist's eye for their arrangement is wanting?" She had taken the vase from Nadia and removed half its contents, then, with a twirl here and a poke there, she transformed the remainder into a thing of beauty. "I regret to perceive that the artistic instinct, the soul of poetry, is wanting in my daughter. She is very thorough, extremely conscientious, but what one may call—not heavy, that would be unkind—shall we say *solid*? I am perpetually worrying myself to discover why she bears no resemblance at all to me. 'A reversion to an earlier type,' I suppose the scientific gentlemen would call it; *I* say that she is one of the trials of my life. For me, I am not at all conscientious, I do nothing thoroughly; but I think I am not heavy?" She paused with her eyebrows uplifted in interrogation; and Cyril, though he had been reflecting what wretchedly bad form it was for a woman to try to make her daughter feel small in this way, had presence of mind enough to answer that such a word could never be mentioned in the same breath with the name of Madame O'Malachy.

"But I must hurry away," the lady went on, "or O'Malachy will come up to look for me. I shall hear your news when I return, Milord Cyril."

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR HIS GOOD.

"I THINK I have one piece of news that at any rate you will like to hear," said Cyril, as Madame O'Malachy rustled out of the room and down the corridor towards the lift.

Nadia's grey eyes glanced towards him. "You did not come here to offer us hothouse flowers," she remarked. "There is something else that you have to say."

"Won't you believe that I came to enjoy the delightful conversation of Madame and yourself?" asked Cyril, lazily, for he was in a particularly comfortable chair, and found the spectacle of Nadia's laborious dealing with the flowers very entertaining.

"No," she answered, bluntly, irritated by his manner.

"Well, Caerleon intends to offer your brother a commission in the palace guard. Is that important enough to satisfy you?"

"I daresay it is important, but it is not what you came to say."

"You are a little exacting, mademoiselle. Is this what you want? My brother asked me to tell you that he proposes to begin to-day the investigation you recommended him to set on foot."

"That is good!" she cried. "I knew I should not be disappointed in him. But you have another message still."

"Pardon me, I have no other message, although my business with you grows, if I may say so, out of that last message."

"Precisely, and I know what it is. You wish to say that his Majesty's eager compliance with my wishes betokens a state of affairs which you, as a man of the world, consider highly inexpedient when it exists in connection with the King of Thracia and a penniless foreigner."

"I had no intention of saying anything so rude; but I will own that although when Caerleon and I first had the honour of meeting your family, I saw no insuperable objection to his pleasing himself in marrying, things are different now. I blame myself very much that I did not foresee this change and try——"

"I don't want your regrets, Lord Cyril," interrupted Nadia. "Let us keep to the facts as they are. They are sufficiently obvious. I agree with you, that for the King to marry me would probably cost him his throne, and that is a sacrifice I could not accept."

"I'm very glad you see it in this light," began Cyril, rather taken aback by her coolness; but she interrupted him.

"You know quite well that I should have preferred our acquaintance to cease when we parted at Witska, and that since that could not be, I am most anxious to leave Thracia as soon as possible. I have done all I could to induce my parents to return to Janoszwar, but in vain. You must do your part. Why will you not help me? Why have you given Louis this commission, when it will only be an excuse for our remaining in the country?"

"As a delicate compliment to the future Queen of Thracia," said Cyril, in his smoothest tones. "At least, I am sure that is the light in which Caerleon regards it."

"He should not be so confident," said Nadia. "Queen of Thracia you at least know that I shall never be. I expect you to help me in disappointing the King for his good. This is my plan. My parents are Scythian agents—you know that already, but I make the admission that you may have fuller right to take action"—and she laughed bitterly. "As for Louis, I don't know whether he has accepted the commission you are offering him or not; but if he has, it is only that he may do you greater harm. He is here for the purpose of plotting against the independence of Thracia. Well, then, have us arrested to-night and conveyed to the frontier; then your anxieties may cease."

"I beg your pardon; they would only begin," said Cyril. "You are leaving Caerleon out of your reckoning altogether, Miss O'Malachy. Do you know, I wished most fervently as I came down here just now that I could bring myself to say that I was come to make terms with you on Caerleon's behalf and with his knowledge. Matters would be so much easier if I could only request you in his name to leave the kingdom, and not seek to continue a friendship begun under such different circumstances. But I couldn't make up my mind to rob the poor fellow of his character in that way, and so—"

"I should never have believed you!" cried Nadia, with flashing eyes.

"You are very flattering. But if I had assured you that it was true?"

"I should have asked the King himself."

"Surely not?" said Cyril. "I thought that young ladies never, under any circumstances, spoke out boldly and asked for an explanation?"

"I should in such a case," said Nadia, proudly. "I would do anything rather than believe him false and a coward."

"Well, unfortunately, I can't make you think that of him," said Cyril. "I know perfectly well that if you left Bellaviste, as you propose, he would simply follow you anywhere, and insist upon your marrying him."

"I would never do it," said Nadia, her lips white.

"I never thought you would; but I am afraid it would move Europe to laughter to see the King of Thracia pursuing from place to place a young lady—"

"Who was the daughter of a Scythian spy!" cried Nadia, with a fierce laugh. "You are right, Lord Cyril; it would be worse than wrong, it would be ridiculous. And ridicule must never touch any one connected with Lord Cyril Mortimer; he could not endure it, all his relations must be above suspicion in that respect. Well, I will not only leave Bellaviste, but I will write to his Majesty a letter explaining my reason for doing so. Does that satisfy you?"

"But—excuse me," said Cyril; "has my brother ever really asked you to marry him?"

"If he had, he would have received his answer already," returned Nadia. "Most certainly he has not."

"You really must pardon me—but do you intend to write a letter declining a proposal that has never been made to you?"

"Why not? You know, and he knows, and I know, that he loves me. Why make all this trouble? You

do not wish him to write to me first? I might keep his letter, sell it to a newspaper, make it the groundwork of a scandal that would spread through Europe, who knows? Come, I will write now: you shall tell me what to say if you like."

"Excuse me, but this will never do," said Cyril, refusing to give way when she tried to pass him and reach the writing-table. "Do you think Caerleon would under any circumstances consent to regard a message in a letter—which was not even written in answer to one from him—as your final decision? He would see at once that there had been outside influence at work, and suspect that you had written under pressure. He must hear everything from your own lips."

"Oh, why must you make it so hard for me? Let me write," entreated Nadia, standing before him with clasped hands.

"It is impossible," said Cyril, firmly. "You must see him."

"Is it absolutely necessary? Then I suppose I must," said Nadia, drawing a deep breath. "But remember, Lord Cyril, I will tell no lies. He shall know my reason for refusing him."

"I thought," said Cyril, "that young ladies considered themselves justified in telling a little fib on such occasions, such as saying that they found they did not care for their suitors in quite the right way, or something of the kind?"

"The young ladies with whom you are acquainted may tell fibs," returned Nadia, with a cool incisiveness that reminded him of her mother, "but I do not. Does it not seem to you hard enough to have to refuse the man who loves me, that you wish me to do it by means of a lie?"

"How can you expect him to accept his dismissal if

you go into details in the way you propose?" asked Cyril. "Can't you simply refuse him without giving a reason? It is a lady's privilege, you know."

"That I will not do!" cried Nadia, fiercely. "He shall not be forced to think that the woman to whom he has given his love is insensible—a stone. He shall know that her suffering is at least as great as his."

"Well, you have your own ideas as to the best way of imparting consolation, certainly," said Cyril. "I suppose I can't quarrel with you, so long as you do really send him off."

"Of course I shall send him away," said Nadia. "I have known for a week that it must be done. Bring him here, and I will tell him that I cannot marry him. Perhaps you would wish to remain in the room, so as to assure yourself that I keep faith with you?"

"Caerleon must not come here," said Cyril, thoughtfully, disregarding the taunt. "It is most important for us to avoid notice. I must contrive a meeting for you somewhere, which may seem accidental, even if it is observed."

"Do you wish to destroy my good name as well as your brother's happiness, Lord Cyril?" she asked, cuttingly. Cyril made a movement of impatience.

"You are determined to put me in the wrong," he said, facing her indignant eyes without flinching. "If you will only remember that my brother's name would be at least as much affected as yours in such a case, you will judge me more fairly. I can assure you that the only meeting of which I was thinking was one in the intervals of a dance, or some entertainment of the kind. Surely you must see the need for secrecy? It is not merely that my brother must not marry you. He must marry some one else."

Cyril had his revenge for all the unpleasantness of the morning, for Nadia, after one wild start, stood as if she had been turned to stone.

"Another girl?" she gasped at last. "Who is she? Do I know her? No; don't tell me her name. I shall hear it quite soon enough, and I don't want to hate her. Some princess? and she is to marry him?—and he is mine!"

"I am sure you must see," Cyril went on quietly, "that both for her sake and his we must get this matter settled without any fuss."

"If she marries him, I don't think a little trouble would hurt her," said Nadia, enviously.

"I hope it may be so. But you must remember that this marriage would be an arranged thing—a literal *mariage de convenance*, indeed. We could hardly expect her to feel towards Caerleon as—as you do, and although, if she cared for him, she might overlook even a scandal, yet if she did not, the merest whisper might turn her against him. Without considering her feelings in such a case at all, you must remember that it would be very painful indeed for Caerleon. I am sure you would not wish their married life to be unhappy."

"If she married him for the sake of the crown, she would deserve to be unhappy," said Nadia.

"I am afraid we must leave that to her own conscience," said Cyril.

"Conscience!" cried Nadia, "and what of yours? If the King ever discovers what you have been doing this morning, I think—I should be almost sorry—even for you."

"I leave myself in your hands, you see, in perfect confidence."

"Oh yes, honour among thieves!" said Nadia, bitterly

"We are both plotting against the King, and therefore we may well keep faith with one another. Have you delivered all your messages now, Lord Cyril? If so, I must ask you to go, for I am busy. Pray ring for a waiter to attend you down-stairs."

She gave him a distant bow, and remained standing by the table, tall and rigid, until he was out of sight, then dragged herself slowly across the corridor to her own room, groping with outspread hands as though she had been in darkness, opened the door, entered, locked it, and threw herself on the floor, a shuddering, sobbing heap.

"Quite an exciting morning!" said Cyril to himself, as he strolled back to the palace. "It's a pity that that Nadia girl can't be queen, after all. She is cut out for ruling a nation given to revolutions, like this one. I can fancy her facing a yelling mob without turning a hair. But melodrama in daily life is a bore. After our conversation one feels mean, somehow—rather as if one had been committing murder."

All unconscious of what Nadia stigmatised as the plot against his happiness, Caerleon spent the morning in the balcony of the Hôtel de Ville, listening, with what patience he might, to speeches of which he could not understand a word. It was his first opportunity of making the acquaintance of the other members of the Drakovics Ministry, who were on ordinary occasions rather cast into the shade by the commanding personality of their chief. The greater number of them were country gentlemen, belonging to the class of landed proprietors which formed the backbone of the nation, since each man's tenants and villagers followed his lead in peace and war as his feudal vassals. Living

in rude plenty, untouched by the influence of western luxury, on their own estates, these chieftains had found their patriotic and religious instincts outraged by the irregular life and Scythian sympathies of the late king, and they had given their support loyally to M. Drakovics at the time of the revolution, believing him to be the only man who could save the State from the various dangers which threatened it. They had accepted posts in the Administration merely in order that the prestige of their names might assist the Premier in his task, and he reciprocated the service by allowing them to remain at their ease in the country unless their presence was demanded at the capital on some important occasion, such as a parliamentary crisis; but they had rallied around him to-day in their full strength without being summoned, conspicuous in their rich national costume, magnificent with fur and gold embroideries. Caerleon they were prepared to welcome as the Premier's choice, but their first meeting with him disposed them to take a fancy to him for his own sake; and when some one had remembered that the English were supposed to be, as a nation, lovers of sport, he received so many invitations to come and hunt various animals that he might have imagined that life in Thracia was mainly devoted to the chase.

The persons who in reality carried on the work of government were not the grey-haired chiefs who surrounded their new King, but the army of inferior officials to whom the Scythian newspapers were wont to refer scathingly as "briefless barristers and unsuccessful journalists." They were western to a fault, wore their black broadcloth as though to the manner born, and it was easy to see that it was on them, and not on the titular heads of their departments, that M. Drako-

vics relied for the prosecution of his policy. Each of these men was directly responsible to him, for the nominal Ministers relied on him to tell them what papers they were to sign, and what orders they were to give, and he sent them as subordinates whom he chose. On these subordinates he could depend, for he had raised them from their original obscurity to the position they occupied at present, and all their interests were bound up with his, so that they were ready to cling to him through thick and thin. Perilous as such an autocracy may appear, the dangers which usually accompany an experiment of the kind had not as yet shown themselves in any great degree, probably owing to the common peril from Scythia which menaced ruler and ruled alike, while the administration of King Peter Franzia had been so corrupt that the people hailed the present one as a foretaste of the millennium.

During the greater part of the time Caerleon found abundant interest in watching the throng around him, while the Ministers made speeches one after the other, or presented loyal addresses from the districts they represented, and the people in the market-place cheered whenever they caught an allusion to the revolution or to the new King. When this preliminary business was over, M. Drakovics came forward for the most important event of the day—the speech which was to explain the postponement of the coronation. As he proceeded, Caerleon became interested in spite of his ignorance of the language, for the Premier's tones and gestures were almost eloquent enough to take the place of words. He had appeared hitherto as an astute politician, genuinely patriotic, no doubt, according to his lights, but not capable of any very lofty flight of imagination. But now Caerleon could wonder no longer

at his power of swaying the susceptible Thracians, since he himself could feel the force of his scathing denunciation of the former *régime*, his reference to the revolution, brief yet full of meaning, his indignant declaration that to Scythia, their constant enemy, they owed the two years of uncertainty and instability which had retarded the rightful development of the country, and his joyful reminder that at last they had found a prince willing to cast in his lot with theirs, and to dare and suffer as a Thracian. When the wild outburst of cheering which followed the last sentence had ceased, M. Drakovics continued in a lower voice, charged with deep meaning. Scythian jealousy was not yet dead, Scythian enmity was not even slumbering; already had an attempt been made to prevent the ratification of the people's choice. Be it so! Thracia was in no hurry; she would delay the ceremony of crowning her king for a while, and make more seemly preparations for conducting it with fitting splendour. Scythia had endeavoured to brand the opening of the new reign with a bad omen, by the destruction of the ancient relic which was at once the sign and the home of the nation's faith; but Thracia would turn the omen into one of joy, for as St Peter's chapel rose stronger and more beautiful from its ashes, so would the kingdom of Carlino rise powerful and pure from the unavoidable disorders of the revolution, and the oppression and corruption which had marked the rule of Peter Franzia and Ivan Sertchajeff.

"If that man's words are equal to his voice and manner," said Caerleon to himself, as M. Drakovics ceased, "he must be one of the greatest orators in the world."

More speeches from different representatives of the

people followed ; but at last the King was able to return to the palace, and to seek his brother in the room which M. Drakovics had recommended should be allotted to him for the performance of his duties as Caerleon's secretary. Cyril was testing the security of the cupboards which lined the panelled walls, and he was so resolutely bent on expatiating on the business-like appearance of his surroundings that it was some time before Caerleon could put the question he was anxious to ask.

“ Well, did you see her ? ”

“ Oh, Miss O'Malachy ? ” asked Cyril, raising his eyebrows. “ Yes, I saw her. I can't say that she impressed me favourably. She never does, somehow.”

“ Happily it's not necessary that she should,” returned Caerleon, sharply. “ When am I to see her ? ”

“ I have been thinking about that, and I can't find an opportunity earlier than that ball which the municipality are to give next week.”

“ But how am I to speak to her when we are dancing ? ”

“ You don't imagine she would dance ? You must sit out, of course. This is how we shall have to work it. I will ask her to sit out with me, and take her into the conservatory, or some place of that kind, where you will be waiting. Then I'll keep guard until you have said what you want to say (I hope and trust it won't take long), and I will convoy her back to her mother.”

“ I think I am capable of doing that,” said Caerleon.

“ Yes, if she accepts you ; but I don't for a moment think she will. You see what I mean, old man ? —it seems rather a nasty thing to say—but I don't believe she cares for you sufficiently. She's as proud as

Lucifer, and people are bound to say that she married you for the sake of the crown. Would she be able to stand it?"

"I believe she is sensible enough not to care what people say if she once sees that it is right to marry me. But you never have understood her. Look here, Cyril; why should we put it off so long? Let us give a ball ourselves one evening this week."

"How can we, when you haven't a lady at the head of affairs? You might let yourself in for most horrible awkwardness. I don't even know whether it would be proper for Madame O'Malachy to bring her daughter. You can't go compromising yourself in the eyes of Europe in this way. Don't think of giving balls until you are married, unless you like to get Mrs Sadleir out from home, and introduce her as your aunt and the natural head of your establishment."

"I'm certain she would never come," said Caerleon, gloomily. "But after all," and his face brightened, "perhaps it is as well to wait for a week. If I can tell Nadia that I have come to some conclusion on the question of initiating temperance legislation, it may please her, so I will set to work at once. I am going to send to England for some books I want. I don't know whether there is anything you would like me to order for you at the same time?"

"Give me the list, and let me write," said Cyril, quickly. "You have a secretary now, Caerleon, and you mustn't go sending orders to tradesmen with your own royal hand. It's making yourself too cheap."

But writing to a London bookseller was an inconsiderable trifle compared with the work which Caerleon proceeded to undertake as a necessary consequence of his promise to Nadia. Cyril showed no inclination for

the inquisitorial rambles he meditated, and he was therefore obliged to secure the services of the detective whom M. Drakovics had recommended, and who spoke English sufficiently well to be of use. Under his guidance, the King paid surprise visits to different parts of his capital at various hours of the day, mingling freely with the people who thronged the *cafés* and there spent their time in drinking brandy and discussing politics. It was in vain to attempt any disguise, for the Thracians knew their sovereign's height and figure too well for anything of the kind to be successful; but they are a polite nation, and when Caerleon came among them *incognito*, they did not appear to recognise him, perceiving that he wished to acquaint himself with the characteristics of the national life. Perhaps they were also a little flattered by the interest he showed in their favourite pursuits, for they were always ready to talk, and through the medium of his escort he obtained a great deal of valuable information, the result of which went far to convince him that Nadia was in the right, and that temperance legislation of some kind was a crying need of the country. There seemed to be no effective restraint on the sale of spirits, and during the last two years more especially the vendors had reaped a golden harvest. The feeling of uncertainty and unrest caused by the revolution, and the delay in obtaining a king, had disposed the people to indulge in much talk and speculation on political subjects; and to enjoy this to its fullest extent, it was natural that they should resort to the *cafés*, where coffee proved inadequate to quench their patriotic thirst. That some change must be made in this state of affairs if the country was to prosper, Caerleon was not slow to recognise, and the wisdom of his decision

was confirmed by the statistics which M. Drakovics obtained at his request from Government officers all over Thracia; so that the subject cost him much anxious thought during the week which preceded the municipal ball at the Hôtel de Ville.

For Cyril, also, this was a period not devoid of anxiety. In spite of all his precautions, the secret of Cærleon's admiration for Nadia had become public property. The disclosure was mainly due to an American journalist who was supposed to be writing up the minor Courts of Europe for the benefit of aspiring New York belles, and who had hastened to Thracia as soon as he heard of the accession of a bachelor king, and taken up his quarters at the Hôtel Occidental. At the *table d'hôte* he fell in with the O'Malachy family, and was immediately captivated by the cosmopolitan charms of Madame O'Malachy. From her he learnt all that there was to be learnt about the new sovereign, and not improbably a good deal more; and since nothing is sacred to the New Journalist, he worked up all that he heard into what he called "A Real Royal Romance," for the columns of the paper he represented. The details caused great excitement among the heiresses of the Fifth Avenue, and filtered gradually back, through the medium of English and Parisian newspapers, to those of Bellaviste, where M. Drakovics, after reading them, made Cyril's life a burden to him.

"There has been frightful mismanagement somewhere!" he cried, charging into the secretary's office on the very morning of the municipal ball, after Cyril had with difficulty restrained him hitherto from issuing edicts for the suppression of the offending newspapers and the expulsion of the American special correspon-

dent. "This is the point to which your diplomacy has led us, milord. Here is the editor of the 'Empire City Crier' telegraphing to this Mr Hicks, 'Cable immediately full particulars of Miss O'Malachy's appearance, style of dress, taste in perfumes and bonbons. All the latest novelties here are named after her. Send any recent portraits.' And here in Bellaviste we have the whole female population, from the wives of the Ministers to the shop-girls, crowding the street in front of the hotel to catch a glimpse of her, and insisting on dressing their hair like hers. It is intolerable!"

"It is," assented Cyril. "But I hope this state of affairs will come to an end to-day. If it does not, I shall perceive that in some way or other you have failed to adhere to our compact. Have confidence in me, and you will see that it will be all right. Only you must be absolutely passive at the ball to-night; and if you happen to miss my brother from the room at the same time as Miss O'Malachy, merely try to cover his absence as far as possible. If you don't, I give you fair warning, I'll advise her to marry him."

"Naturally I will keep to our agreement, milord," said M. Drakovics, and went away unhappy. But Cyril was doomed not to be left in peace this morning. Another visitor was announced—this time the O'Malachy, who entered with his most military air, and with a look of repressed sadness on his face.

"Come to play the outraged parent!" groaned Cyril, mentally, and he was not mistaken. The O'Malachy refused to take a chair, and stood tall and solemn in the middle of the floor, looking at Cyril more in sorrow than in anger.

"Lord Cyril," he said, "I'm aware that your position

and ours have changed since circumstances first introduced us to each other. But I am still a father, with a father's feelings, and the representative of the ancient kings of Leitrum is not a man that can rightly be slighted. I'd willingly have remained with me family in our modest obscurity, but we have been removed from it by the King's action. I am not an ambitious man, there's no one can accuse me of thrusting me daughter upon his Majesty, but neither will I have a slur cast upon her. You know as well as I do how greatly your brother sought me daughter's presence until a week ago. Since then he has never come near her, and people are talking. I ask you plainly, what are his Majesty's intentions ?"

"The most honourable possible," replied Cyril, with suitable seriousness. "I may mention to you, in the strictest confidence, that my brother is hoping to propose to Miss O'Malachy at the ball to-night. Of course she will be there ?"

"The last thing I heard was that she did not dance, and would not come," said the O'Malachy, ruefully. Cyril smiled.

"I think Madame O'Malachy will be able to induce her to come, if you take them a special message from me to say that her presence is indispensable," he said.

"Ah now, if you could write that to them in the King's name ?" suggested the O'Malachy, brightening.

"Wouldn't you like to have it to show ?" thought Cyril. Aloud he added, "I think you must know, O'Malachy, that M. Drakovics is bent upon the King's marrying some lady belonging to a royal house. Under these circumstances, it is as well not to give him any opportunity of interfering until my brother has settled

things with Miss O'Malachy. Such a paper as you propose might lead to complications with him."

"I dislike all this secrecy greatly," grumbled the O'Malachy. "Why would not his Majusty have given some public hint of his intentions? 'Twould have been an excellent opporchunity when he gazetted umself honorary colonel of the Carlino Regiment."

"My dear O'Malachy, would you have him imply that your daughter was ready to jump at his offer?" asked Cyril, and he looked rather nonplussed.

"I'll not keep you longer now," he said, moving towards the door. "You understand, Lord Cyrul, that in case of—of an alliance between your family and mine, me wife and I would esteem ut alike our juty and our pleasure to place what little experience and influence we may possess at the disposal of his Majusty and the Thracian Government?"

"What a double-dyed old traitor he is!" thought Cyril, as he returned from seeing his visitor to the door. "I believe I should prefer his enmity to his friendship."

And having disposed of the matter satisfactorily, he applied himself to more important business, not thinking again of the evening until it was time to dress for the ball.

CHAPTER IX.

A WOMAN OF HER WORD.

THE ball given by the municipality of Bellaviste at the Hôtel de Ville in honour of their new King was the grandest entertainment ever seen in the city. Every one who had the slightest claim to receive an invitation was present, with the exception of the agents representing the various Powers, and the staffs of their respective consulates, who held themselves severely aloof from a festivity of which the *raison d'être* was the social inauguration of a sovereignty not recognised by the arbiters of European opinion. The display of Thracian costumes and Parisian toilettes was dazzling, but the observed of all observers were Madame O'Malachi and her daughter, who were by no means among the smartest people present. Mr Hicks, the American newspaper correspondent, who had attended so many society functions that he knew as much about female dress as the cleverest lady paragraphist that ever reported an aristocratic wedding, was inclined to be dissatisfied with Nadia's appearance. There was a kind of affectation of humility, he thought, a too evident desire to emphasise the distance between Caerleon and herself, in her severely plain dress of black net, cut

barely low enough to pass muster on such an occasion, and in the absence of any relief, such as might have been afforded by flowers or ornaments, that marked it. It was true that her beautiful head and shoulders appeared to derive additional grace from the simplicity of their surroundings, but there was something unsuitable about the general effect. Did the beggar-maid don her oldest rags when Cophetua came to woo her? Mr Hicks thought not. And again, why did Miss O'Malley look so like a victim led to the sacrifice as she followed her mother into the room, and so anxious and unhappy when her eye rested on the King? Mere excitement would not account for her troubled expression, and she was sure enough of her prize not to be fearful as to the outcome of the ordeal of the evening. Could it be possible that she did not reciprocate the King's affection? Was it—could it be—Mr Hicks ground his teeth as he intercepted a disapproving glance levelled at Nadia by Cyril, and felt for one agonised moment that he had missed the most thrilling point of his romance—was there a rivalry between the brothers?

"I call it real mean of the old lady never to have given me a hint," he groaned, thinking of the extra columns of copy such an intimation would have supplied, but presently he grew calm again. "There's nothing of the sort, or those two fellows couldn't carry on as they are doing. A woman can be as sweet as possible to another when she hates her like poison; but two men can't be easy together when they have quarrelled over a girl."

Reassured to find that he had not let slip an opportunity of gaining information, he set himself once more to watch the glittering scene and observed that Caer-

leon invited Nadia to dance with him as soon as he had done his duty to the wives of the city fathers. He saw Madame O'Malachy's thrill of anxious expectation as the King approached her, and divined instantly that the offer of such an honour was in itself equivalent to a proposal of marriage. But Nadia declined it, although her watchful mother softened the refusal by adding that she did not dance.

"He shouldn't have come to ask her himself," soliloquised Mr Hicks, who knew a good deal more about the etiquette proper for royalty than did most of the exalted personages at whose Courts he sojourned. "Ought to have sent his brother, or his equerry—if he has one. And she had no business to refuse, anyway. A girl that don't dance ought not to go to Court balls."

But although he turned away with a feeling of lordly contempt for people who could manage their affairs so badly, Mr Hicks took care not to lose sight of Nadia during the evening. More than half the programme had been gone through when he saw Cyril sauntering up to her. He also saw Nadia shiver slightly, then sit very erect, and he guessed that the fateful moment had come.

"Will you sit out this dance with me?" asked Cyril, adjusting one of his sleeve-links as he spoke. The American, watching him, thought the action a piece of aristocratic rudeness, but Cyril was merely doing his best not to look towards Madame O'Malachy. If she should gain from his face an inkling of his compact with her daughter, she was quite capable, he was sure, of making a scene in public, supposing that she judged it to be to her interest to do so, and he felt much relieved when he had succeeded in avoiding her eye,

and had left her engrossed in conversation with Mr Hicks. With Nadia on his arm, he led the way to one of the smaller balconies, which were curtained off from the corridors, and decorated with plants and palms, and here he found her a seat.

"Caerleon may not be here just yet," he said. "I saw him dancing with Madame Sertchaieff just now. He has to be civil to her, you know, as she is the War Minister's wife." He went on talking lightly in his ordinary tones, and did not testify any resentment when Nadia vouchsafed no answer to his cheerful commonplaces, but sat still, her rigid hands outstretched before her and locked in one another, until her face changed suddenly at the sound of a footstep without.

"I was very lucky in getting off so soon," said a voice, and Caerleon drew back the curtain and stood before them, in all the magnificence of the full-dress uniform of the Carlino Regiment. "I caught my spur in Madame Sertchaieff's dress," he went on, "and tore it so badly that she had to go and get it sewn up. Now, Cyril, old man, if you will add to your kindness by making yourself scarce for a little while, I shall be much obliged."

Resisting the temptation to give Nadia a last glance of warning, Cyril departed obediently, and mounted guard in the corridor outside with an air of philosophical calmness, which he was very far from feeling. If she should fail him now! "It would make Thracia too hot to hold me," he mused, "for she's bound to tell Caerleon the whole story at once," and he shifted his position impatiently as he pictured the look of pain and aversion which the revelation would bring into Caerleon's honest eyes. He would have been still more

anxious as to the results of his diplomacy if he could have heard the words in which, without wasting time on preliminaries, his brother went straight to the matter in hand.

"I am going to ask you to make a great sacrifice for me, Nadia. Those silly women out there may think that it's something very grand to be Queen of Thracia, but you know better, and so do I. It means isolation, and worry, and being opposed and thwarted in what you have set your heart on, and it is very likely to mean danger, perhaps death. There are not many women I could ask to share these things with me; but I think that you care for me enough to be willing to help me through it all."

He had struck the right chord at once, and the eloquence of Nadia's eyes encouraged him to go on.

"I know," he said, taking her hands in his, "that it doesn't sound the proper thing for me to throw it all on you, and ask you to take me as a charity, but it seems to appeal to you more strongly if it is put in that light. Doesn't it signify to you at all that I care for you, Nadia? that I have loved you since the very first day I saw you? I don't believe you realise in the least what you are to me. I wish I could make you understand how I love you. Look at me—look into my eyes, and perhaps you will see."

But Nadia shivered, and drew her hands out of his clasp. The vehemence of his tone frightened her, and she dared not meet his eye. She could not say a word, for the lump which had suddenly risen in her throat seemed to choke her. He noticed her agitation, and tried to speak more calmly.

"I am sure you can't possibly know," he said, "what a revelation it is to a man who has become accustomed

to look at things in an ordinary everyday way, to be brought into close contact with a woman whose sole idea is to do right. One's courage fails sometimes, when one is alone against the world, and I want you to help me to do what ought to be done for the kingdom."

"I can't marry you," gasped Nadia, looking up at him with anguished eyes; "it would not be right."

"Not right! Why not?" he asked in astonishment.

"On account of so many things. My parents—Louis—"

"I am sure you need not trouble yourself about them," said Caerleon, with an involuntary smile at the thought of the ease with which the O'Malachy family would almost certainly be managed. "Louis is provided for in the army, and your father and mother will give up their wandering life, and settle down quietly here."

"But it is myself!" cried Nadia, desperately. "I am not what you want in a wife, not good enough, not—not important enough. I should do nothing but bring trouble upon you. I am afraid to marry you. I dare not do it. I will not."

"I think you will, when you understand how much I want you," said Caerleon, with all the spirit of his fighting forefathers roused by her opposition. "Why, I am offering you work, and you know you have often told me that it is wrong to refuse work when it comes in one's way. You cannot tell me that you mean to cast me off because you are afraid of the silly remarks people will make?"

"Oh, why will you make me say it?" she cried, driven to bay by his tone. "I will not marry you, then, because you ought to marry a princess—some one

who has been brought up to be a queen, and whose family will be a support to you in Europe. That is what you must do."

"Nadia!" he said in astonishment, "you tell me to marry a stranger, when I love you? You can't think that right?"

"I know," she said, despairingly. "It all seems to me horribly, fearfully wrong, but it must be right, because it is so hard to do."

"You are in love with martyrdom," he said, with unwonted sternness; "but you have no right to try to sacrifice me as well as yourself."

"Very well, say that I am in love with martyrdom, then," she answered, drearily. "Persuade yourself that I love it better than I do you."

"I have no doubt you do," returned Caerleon; "but I have the misfortune to love you better than an utterly unnecessary sacrifice."

"And I," she said, "love you so much that for your sake I can separate myself from you for ever."

"Is that your idea of love?" he asked bitterly, but with something of dismay in his voice.

"It is," she answered.

"But, Nadia, this is monstrous!" he cried. "You tell me that you love me, and yet you order' me to marry some one else. You must know that such a thing can't be right. Sit down here quietly, and let us talk the matter out. I think you will see that you are cruelly unfair."

"I daresay I should," said Nadia, refusing to take the seat to which he tried to draw her. "I have not a doubt that you could convince me—make me yield, at any rate, since my own heart is on your side. But you will not. I know that you are stronger than I am,

and you will not take an ignoble advantage of your strength to make me do what I know is wrong. Think," as he gazed at her in silence, "how we should feel, if I married you, and our marriage plunged Thracia into misfortunes—if you were forced to abdicate."

"I should do it with a good conscience, and go home happily with you," returned Caerleon, with unexpected promptness. "If that's all, I'll abdicate now. What do I care for the kingdom? There has been nothing but worry and rumours of approaching trouble since I accepted it, and if it's to come between you and me, I'll have nothing more to do with it."

"Oh no, no," entreated Nadia, clinging to his arm as he turned towards the doorway. "Don't talk like that! Let me believe in you still. You accepted the kingdom because it was right, for the sake of the people, and I know you will govern wisely. Don't let me be disappointed in you. If I can give you up because it is right, you can give me up. I can bear anything if I am sure that I can trust you to go on as you have begun."

"What can I do?" broke out Caerleon in his despair. "You do your best to break my heart, and then you expect me not even to struggle. Nadia, have you no pity? Give me some hope. Say that after a year—two years—any length of time—I may speak to you again. What is a man to do when you bring up his own sense of honour against him?"

"He must submit," said Nadia. Caerleon stood looking at her in silence, his heart protesting wildly against the barriers she had raised between them. It was on his lips to say, "You have told me you love me, and that's enough. Nothing shall part us." He felt sure

that his love must prevail over her scruples ; she had said so herself. But she had appealed to his chivalry ; how could he disappoint her ? The struggle was a cruel one, and he turned away from her without a word. She saw her advantage, and went on—

"I know you will let me be proud of you still. You won't know where I am, but I shall always watch what you are doing, and I shall feel glad to think that perhaps I have helped you—a little. And then some day you will meet some one whom it is right for you to marry, and you will remember that I wished it——"

"Are you trying to drive me mad, Nadia ?" he cried, turning upon her fiercely. "If you told me you did not care for me, I could bear it better. But it makes one feel such a fool, when you have said you love me, to stand back and let you go. How can you expect it of me ?"

"It is right," she answered, slowly.

"Let me kiss you once, only once," he entreated.

"Oh no, no, no !" she almost shrieked, feeling that her resolution must give way at the touch of his lips. "Keep your kisses for your bride !"

"I don't think I have deserved that," he said, bitterly. "Understand once for all, Nadia, that you need not lay the flattering unction to your soul that I shall comfort myself as you please yourself by imagining I shall do. I can't marry you against your will, but I won't marry any other woman. Until I met you I thought that I should never marry, and now that you won't have me I know it. It is you or no one, and you will cheerfully sacrifice me to a fancied scruple——"

"You see that you are well rid of me," said Nadia.

"Nonsense !" cried Caerleon. "I love you more than

ever. I can't do without you. Just think of the life to which you are condemning me. To be alone always, never to be able to get away from the glare and rush of public life, never to have any one to cheer me on, never to have a home. I thought you would have helped me. I thought you would be there to advise me when I could not see my way clearly. You always seem to be sure of the right path at once. Do you really think that marrying the Emperor of Scythia's daughter—if I had the faintest intention of taking the advice you have been giving me to-night—would ever make up for that? I don't mean to marry to strengthen my position in Europe. I want a wife who will look at things without fear or favour, and help me to do what is right. Isn't this a mission for you? Tell me, my dearest, is there no chance for me?"

"None," she answered, with difficulty, the fervency of his pleading almost destroying her power of speech. "Please, please, say no more. You cannot tell how my heart is longing to say Yes; but I dare not yield. Don't you see that all the course of our lives has been leading up to this—to the great choice between right and wrong? It is right now to think of the kingdom, and not of ourselves, and so I can be strong to refuse you for your own sake. It is hard for you, I know, but I think it is harder for me. You can stand alone, but I—oh! I could not do it if I was not sure it was right. Never, never think that I did not love you. Please let me go." He loosed her hands, and she drew aside the curtain and passed out, looking back at him as he stood watching her in despairing silence, then tapped Cyril on the shoulder with her fan. "Will you kindly take me back to my mother, Lord Cyril? She was intending to leave early."

Mr Hicks, when in after days he related his impressions of the incidents of that evening, whether in conversation or in the columns of the 'Empire City Crier,' was wont to remark, with much originality and force, that coming events cast their shadows before them, and that there is no accounting for the sympathetic movements of certain finely constituted minds. This was his way of leading up to the striking fact that while he and Madame O'Malachy were in the midst of a pleasant chat, in which the reputations of various Thracian notabilities suffered rather severely, the lady broke off suddenly in the course of a sentence and sighed deeply. In response to his anxious inquiries, she assured him that she was not ill, but that she felt a presentiment of coming misfortune,—“and at such a time as this,” she added, “you, monsieur, as a friend of the family, will be at no loss to understand the subject of my anxiety. You will pardon a mother’s weakness, but it is hard to see two young lives wrecked by an obstinate pride. You have watched with interest the course of the attachment—the royal idyl, as I might call it—between the King and my daughter, and I know you will sympathise with me in my fear lest Nadia, in her sensitive delicacy, should have refused her lover through fear of being supposed to covet his throne.”

“And you’ll scarcely believe me,” Mr Hicks was accustomed to continue, ignorant that by means of a mirror behind him Madame O’Malachy had noticed Nadia approaching her from the other end of the room, and discerned in an instant that her companion was not Caerleon, “but the words were not out of her mouth when I saw Lord Cyril in the distance, with Miss O’Malachy on his arm as white as a sheet, and I knew

her mother was right at once. No girl that had just accepted a king ever went about with a face like that."

"Oh, Mr Hicks, do tell!" his enraptured audience would exclaim; and Mr Hicks would go on to detail how Madame O'Malachy had turned as white as her daughter on seeing her face, but had said calmly that the heat of the room was too much for Miss Nadia, and they must go home; and how she had turned to him with a sorrowful look that went to his heart, and whispered, "My kind friend, do this for us. If any one speaks to you of the matter we were discussing, let it be known that my daughter has refused his Majesty for the reason I feared."

In fulfilling this parting request Mr Hicks, as a gallant American, and therefore a sworn servant of the fair sex, had spent the remainder of the evening, only pausing to glance at the King as he passed through the hall about half an hour later with set face and firmly closed lips on his way back to the palace, on the plea of illness. To the observer who had noted duly at the beginning of the entertainment that "his Majesty looked extremely well, and conversed affably with the different persons presented to him," the change spoke volumes; but other people were not quite so ready to accept Madame O'Malachy's explanation as he was. More than one of the chaperons with whom he touched on the subject gave it as her opinion that the King had informed Miss O'Malachy that he could not, consistently with his duty to the nation, marry her; and that a harrowing scene had ensued. It was extraordinary how widely it was known in the ballroom that something of the kind had occurred, and Mr Hicks found his duty of impressing Madame O'Malachy's view of the case on his friends to be no sinecure. But he persevered,

for he sympathised deeply with her in her disappointment, and he was also sorry for Nadia, who, as he rightly supposed, would have a good deal to endure from her mother on the way home. "Those outspoken, affectionate women can do an astonishing amount of reproaching when they are once worked up," he said to himself; but he never dreamed of the storm of sarcasm and cruel invective under which Nadia was writhing at the moment.

The next day found Bellaviste society divided into two parties, one of which accepted Madame O'Malachy's account of the events of the evening before, and believed that an insane pride had driven Nadia to refuse the King; while the other, led by Madame Sertchajeff, and relying on the authority of M. Drakovics, held that his Majesty had, more or less directly, declined to marry her. Madame Sertchajeff was the great lady of Bellaviste. As the wife of the Minister for War (the brother of the Ivan Sertchajeff who had been the last Premier of the late king), she took the lead in the society of the city, and derived no small honour from the fact that her husband was the only member of the Ministry whom M. Drakovics treated on anything approaching a footing of equality. With every desire to make the Thracian army invincible, the Premier was handicapped by an absolute ignorance of military affairs, and since General Sertchajeff had turned his back on his brother and his party to adopt the cause of the revolution, he left all the actual work of the bureau in his hands, and also consulted him frequently on the general policy of the Government. Consequently, when Madame Sertchajeff (it is needless to say that she had not been among the ladies whose eagerness to see Nadia had so deeply scandalised the Premier) averred that she had guessed,

from the excitement visible in the King's manner when he danced with her, that he was screwing up his courage to the point of formally breaking off his relations with Miss O'Malachy, and further hinted that the step had been taken on the advice and with the full approval of M. Drakovics, she carried many of her hearers with her. Curiosity was rife as to what would be the next step on either side; but on the evening after the ball the public excitement was cruelly balked by the news that the O'Malachy family, with the exception of Louis, had left the city. They were gone because it could not but be disagreeable to Miss O'Malachy to run the risk of meeting her rejected lover at every turn, said Mr Hicks and his party; because they had received a secret mandate from the police advising them to depart, said Madame Sertchajeff and her friends; because the O'Malachy and his wife, perceiving that there was no opening in Thracia for their peculiar talents, had determined to return to the service of their Scythian employers, thought Cyril.

Had Cyril possessed a conscience in good working order, it might have given him a certain amount of trouble at this time; but systematic neglect and snubbing had reduced his to a condition in which, while it prevented his full enjoyment of his achievements, it never interfered with him during their performance, nor caused him to wish that they had not succeeded. Like the British matron in "Locksley Hall," he had amassed "a little hoard of maxims," or perhaps it would be more correct to say impressions, during his social career, and these he employed as balm whenever his conscience gave him a feeble prick. On the subject of love and marriage these impressions were particularly vivid. Every man, Cyril considered, was bound to fall

in love a greater or less number of times, and the malady was like the measles, in that some took it slightly and others severely. Marriage was one of the things which were better managed in France. Even as it was, every sensible man with a name and a possible career married with a keen eye to present and future advantage, but the alliance ought to be arranged for him as soon as he entered public life, in order to avoid wasting time in the unprofitable experiments mentioned above. Marrying for love was a folly which only the most foolhardy of men would commit, for when the love was gone—and in Cyril's scheme of life it was bound to go very soon—where were you? Circumstances had forced him hitherto to acknowledge a possible exception in the case of his brother. It was eminently desirable that Caerleon should marry; but it was equally evident that he would not marry any one who did not captivate his fancy, and when Nadia appeared on the scene Cyril saw no invincible objection to his pleasing himself. His tastes were simple, and his income, in ordinary years, quite sufficient for his moderate wants, so that money was not a necessity; and if Nadia was not likely to achieve a success in society, Caerleon, on his side, was too much of a faddist ever to get on in Parliament, and thus it might be the most suitable thing for them to settle down at Llandiarmid and elevate the peasantry and lead the county. In this roseate view, as Cyril now ruefully perceived, his wonted foresight had been badly at fault, for he ought to have remembered the shadowy crown, the bestowal of which had since changed everything. Nadia O'Malachy as Queen of Thracia was simply *impossible*, and Caerleon ought to have seen this for himself.

"Why, if I had been in his place," thought Cyril,

forgetting that their views upon the subject were diametrically opposed, "I would have settled the matter off my own bat, and not thrown it all on the girl."

It was in this view that, after seeing Madame O'Malachy and her daughter to their carriage on the fateful evening, he had returned to his brother, and found him still standing as Nadia had left him.

"Anything up, old man?" he inquired, sympathetically.

"She won't have me," responded Caerleon with a kind of dull despair.

"I thought so." Cyril was careful not to assume a tone of superiority, which his brother might have resented under the circumstances. "Well, one doesn't object to a spice of pride in a girl, but this is rather too much. I'm awfully——"

"It was not what you think," Caerleon interrupted quickly: "She refused me because she thought it best —for the kingdom."

"If only Drakovics knew how completely she agreed with him!" murmured Cyril. "But really, you know, Caerleon, such virtue is a little too bright and good for daily life. It's convenient for the rest of us that there are people like that, though they might be rather overpowering to live with, and all we can do is to profit at their expense."

"If you came here to rot me about her——" began Caerleon, angrily.

"I came to fetch you back to the ballroom. People are asking what has become of you."

"Let them ask. You don't imagine that I am going to dance again to-night?"

"I suppose you don't mean to stay here. You had

better get home. You look seedy enough for anything. I'll end up the business for you."

The offer was thankfully accepted, and it was late when Cyril returned to the palace ; but he saw by the lights in Caerleon's rooms that he was still awake, although a knock at the door only produced a mandate from his brother to "go to bed, and let him alone." But Cyril did not sleep that night as soundly as a conscienceless man ought to do, and whenever he awoke he heard Caerleon tramping backwards and forwards through his series of rooms.

CHAPTER X.

REASONS OF STATE

THE reader will without doubt expect to hear that the King appeared in public at his usual hour the next morning, bearing the traces of the night's vigil in his haggard face and deeply lined brow; that he went through the day's business with invincible resolution, but with an abstracted manner, the gloom of which was lightened by an occasional unconquerable sigh; and that he frequently put his hand to his forehead as though to push back the brooding weight of care which oppressed him. It is disappointing to be obliged to chronicle the fact that Caerleon made no attempt to act in this heroic but rather harrowing fashion. He did not appear at all outside his own rooms, but remained shut up in his study, where he buried himself in the piles of blue-books and parliamentary reports for which he had sent to London, growling at Cyril through the door when he besieged him in his retreat, and sending word to M. Drakovics that if he had anything special to communicate he might state his message in writing. For three days he laboured unceasingly, consulting authorities, drawing up, testing, and destroying draft schemes, guarded by the faithful Wright,

who had been summoned from the stables by a sudden message from his master, and informed all comers that "is Majesty was not to be disturbed." The fact that he would have found great pleasure in knocking the Premier down, if he had attempted to force an entrance into the room, undoubtedly contributed to the success of his guardianship.

It happened fortunately that nothing occurred during the three days to render necessary an interview between the King and his Minister, and Cyril and M. Drakovics, giving out that Caerleon had not yet recovered from the illness which had attacked him at the ball, took things into their own hands, and got through a large amount of important business. In so far as international politics were concerned, their course lay at present chiefly in the direction of bluff, for the Powers, scarcely recovered from their surprise at Caerleon's election, had not as yet determined upon the action to be taken in the matter. Notes and protests were flying about from cabinet to cabinet, and the papers announced daily, with awful and mysterious joy, that such and such a statesman had been closeted for over an hour with such and such a potentate, or that this great personage had visited that great personage, and that each had emerged from the interview with a clouded brow. In England, Parliament was enjoying a long recess, and the few stray politicians who were in the habit of arrogating to themselves an interest in the peace of Europe were reduced to writing frantic letters to the papers to demand that a special session should be summoned immediately for the purpose of dethroning Caerleon, or else to inquire why the Government did not at once recognise him as King of Thracia, according to the direction taken by their respective sympathies.

But Cyril's chief concern was with less responsible individuals,—inventors who wished Caerleon to purchase the secret of their new and destructive engines of warfare, or Englishmen who were anxious either to enlist in the Thracian army or to raise a troop of irregular horse in the King's name. To them all Cyril replied with a polite assurance that at the present moment the Thracian army was on so satisfactory a footing that his Majesty had no intention of increasing it, but that when he did so, the correspondent's obliging offer should be borne in mind. This form of words committed Caerleon to nothing, while intimating also that although he desired peace he was prepared for war, and it was calculated to convey a gentle warning to Scythia, and to keep the rest of Europe in a state of agreeable expectancy. Cyril was not a little pleased with his own capacity for statecraft, and he did his best to raise the spirits of M. Drakovics, who was inclined to fear that the King's persistent seclusion foreshadowed some kind of *coup d'état*, or even a determination to govern altogether without a Minister in future. Caerleon was merely working off his disappointment, Cyril assured the Premier, and he would be all right in a day or two. But even Cyril had not calculated on the manner in which his brother had employed his time in his solitude. It was brought to his knowledge at last through the medium of Wright, who on the third evening after the ball entered the smoking-room, where Cyril was sitting with M. Drakovics, and laid a large sealed envelope on the table between them.

"'Is Majesty says, my lord, will you and 'is Excellency," with a nod in the direction of the Premier, "kindly read that, and be ready to discuss with 'im to-morrow any improvements you can suggest."

It was with no small apprehension that Cyril and M. Drakovics, when Wright had departed, opened and read the paper. They did not quite know what they feared, but their brows grew no lighter as they advanced, and at the close Cyril summed up in a tone of utter despair—

“A strict system of licensing to be established for three years all through the kingdom, preparatory to the general adoption of a modification of the Gothenburg scheme! It is the biggest thing ever undertaken in the temperance way!”

“It is absolutely impossible,” said M. Drakovics. “It cannot be done.”

“I am very much afraid it will have to be done,” said Cyril, “if you mean to keep your king. Caerleon has always been mad on the subject of temperance. His extreme views on that question destroyed his chances of office in England, and it would be just like him to risk his crown by putting them forward now. Besides, monsieur, it is just possible he may have noticed that there is sometimes a slight confusion as to which of you is King and which is Minister, and that he means to have it cleared up.”

“It cannot be done,” repeated M. Drakovics, hopelessly, as he rose to go home, taking the paper with him; but when he met his sovereign in the morning he found that the plea of impossibility was not accepted.

“I am not King for my own pleasure, nor did I come here to rule Thracia in accordance with your ideas, M. Drakovics,” said Caerleon, “but for her own good. If I can’t do that, I had better go back to England.”

“But this legislation is undertaken so suddenly—so early in your Majesty’s reign,” objected M. Drakovics.

"Exactly. The people are well affected towards me just now, and will accept a change more readily than they would later, when things had settled down. But of course I have no intention of forcing my views on them against their will."

"Your Majesty will listen to my advice on the subject?"

"As to the best method of introducing the scheme, certainly. I know that you agree with me as to the necessity of stringent legislation—you have said so several times. I think it will be best to bring in the measure at once as a Government bill, letting it be known at the same time that my retaining the crown depends upon its passing without delay."

"This is interfering with the liberty of the subject with a vengeance!" said Cyril. "Are you really bent on risking your crown in this way, Caerleon?"

"I will not rule over a nation of drunkards," returned Caerleon.

"But set to work gradually. Do things by degrees," urged Cyril.

"And establish vested interests," said Caerleon, quickly, "and thus have all our difficulties at home reproduced? No; things are in a state of chaos at present, and there is just this chance of bringing them into order. The more thoughtful among the people see that something must be done, and the Thracians will understand—and appreciate—a single act of authority—call it despotism if you like—better than any amount of compromises."

"But why not go the whole hog, then, and decree prohibition right off? I know that is what you temperance fanatics are always aiming at in the far distance."

"Because it would simply lead to the spread of smuggling and secret distilling, and an illicit traffic which the police would be bribed to condone. They would be corrupted, and the people as bad as ever. Moreover, we should need to revise our commercial treaties, especially with Pannonia, so as to forbid the importation of spirits, and this is too big a thing to be carried through in a hurry, particularly just now. And then, though you call me a fanatic, I am not so bigoted a temperance man as to feel called upon to deprive those people of alcohol for whom a moderate amount of it may be desirable, or even necessary. I merely wish to keep the younger generation from growing up with a taste for dram-drinking, and to make it impossible for men to meet at the *cafés* and muddle themselves with adulterated spirits as they do now."

"But why fool about with licences at all, instead of establishing your beloved Gothenburg system at once throughout the kingdom?"

"Because our present statistics are so imperfect that we have no idea either as to the number of existing public-houses, or the proportion which would meet the actual needs of the country. At present, any man who has a front yard and a table has only to borrow a bench or two and get in a cask of spirits on credit, and there is a new dram-shop. To buy out all these fellows at once would entail an expense impossible for us to meet. In future, as you see, no further taverns are to be opened, except by permission from the central authority, while each year, by means of the sum of money I propose to appropriate for the purpose from my civil list, the rights of a certain number of existing proprietors will be compulsorily acquired. By the end of the third year we ought to have reduced the multitude of public-houses

to something corresponding with the needs of the country, and then there will be a chance for the Gothenburg system. The surviving publicans, who will have been chosen for their good behaviour and careful management during the three years of probation, will have become used to State control, and will have the choice of continuing their employment as salaried servants of the State, or of being bought out at once. I know the scheme is not perfect, but it is the best I can devise with the means at our disposal. We have to deal with the Thracians as we find them."

"Then what are the advantages you claim?"

"Restriction without confiscation, the limitation of public-houses to the smallest possible number, the placing of control in the hands of an impartial central department, with trustworthy inspectors at its command, instead of biased local bodies, and the chance of weaning the younger generation from the drinking habits of their fathers."

"I call it grandmotherly legislation," murmured Cyril.

"There are worse things even than that. I am convinced that this is our one opportunity of action, while the country is in its present unsettled state. The licensing plan will be established before the people know where they are, and according to the scheme that will develop into the Gothenburg system as soon as the idea has become general. If you will be so good as to have the Bill drafted, M. Drakovics, I shall be glad to go through the several clauses with you."

And Caerleon saw his brother and his Prime Minister retire discomfited. The die was cast. He had embarked on the course Nadia had pointed out, and begun the work to which she had urged him. At least

she would know that he was doing his best. His action might be unconstitutional, but if so, that was for the people to resent. If they were wise, they would prefer to be well governed, even by a stretch of the royal prerogative, rather than continue in their present state. If they were not wise, they might seek another king.

But the Thracians proved that they were wise. Caerleon's researches into the social life of Bellaviste, and some of his speeches to prominent persons since he had been in the city, had awakened public feeling on the subject of the drinking customs of the community. The chief desire of the people was to appear in the eyes of Europe as an enlightened nation, and it was a grievous blow for them to discover that they had struck their new King as an assemblage of drunkards. The reproach must be rolled away, and the proposal for reform was accordingly received with acclamation. M. Drakovics was sufficiently far-sighted to perceive that divided councils at this juncture would ruin the future of the kingdom without doing any good to the question, and on the principle of giving up his own way with a good grace when he surrendered it at all, he threw himself loyally into the King's scheme, bestowed endless trouble on the drafting and details of the measure, and introduced it himself in one of his famous speeches. Nor did his pains end here. It was necessary to press the Bill through all its stages as quickly as possible, as, in spite of the enthusiasm with which it was received, a strong opposition to its provisions soon made itself felt, which gathered strength as time went on. The distillers and shopkeepers of Bellaviste, who had been among the staunchest supporters of the late king, but who had profited much by the

excitement of the revolution and the thirst it engendered, were disposed to resist strenuously any interference with their thriving trade of spirit - selling. Opposed to them were the bulk of the national party, young students and politicians principally, with a sprinkling of old patriots who remembered the emancipation of Thracia from the Roumi yoke, and the simple and frugal life which had preceded the rule of the later Franzas. These men had the courage of their convictions. A temperance society, which had been founded by the wife of a former British Consul-General, and had for some time led a languishing existence in Bellaviste, took a new lease of life, and added numbers of enthusiastic converts every day to its roll. Caerleon was unanimously entreated to become the president, and consented to accept the office, whereupon a loyal member made a suggestion for a new medal bearing the King's portrait, which was taken up with enthusiasm, and a large supply ordered. From that day forward the display of a blue ribbon, with one of these medals hanging from it, betokened the ardent Carlinist; and those English reformers who deprecate the degrading of the temperance question into a matter of party politics, would have been forced to admit that in Bellaviste to have taken the pledge was the unerring mark of a member of the national party. But in spite of the ardour of the new converts, the voting power of the liquor - sellers would have swamped the Bill in the Legislative Assembly, if M. Drakovics had not summoned to his aid in the Upper House his supporters from the provinces. The chieftains rallied around him at his call, and since they all entertained a wholesome dislike and contempt for the vices of the city, they voted with one accord for the Bill, which was passed

triumphantly into law. M. Drakovics stood by it to the end without flinching; but when it had received the King's assent, he relieved his mind in private to Cyril.

"One would scarcely have anticipated," he said, "that the people would so enthusiastically support the new King without once asking what were the views of the old Minister."

"Why, what could you expect?" said Cyril. "You introduced the Bill; naturally they thought you approved of it."

"They took it for granted," said M. Drakovics. "The King is now everything; I have only to execute his orders."

"Yes," said Cyril, "you meant him to be figure-head, and he insists on steering. It must be slightly disconcerting."

"You laugh at me, milord? I would ask you to remember that cases have been known in history in which a Minister who has raised a King to power has also deprived him of it."

"And other cases in which the King has dispensed with the services of the Minister," said Cyril, quickly. "I will back my reminiscences against yours, M. Drakovics. But it is foolish to go on quoting modern instances in this way, especially when you remember that Caerleon doesn't care a straw whether you deprive him of the kingdom or not. You have done your best for the Bill, and laid my brother under an obligation. You can't do without him, nor he without you; so don't let us hear any more about dethroning kings and that sort of thing. It's very bad form to talk to me in that way, at any rate, and I don't like it. We shall rub along together very well if we are willing to give and take on both sides. And to cheer you, I'll tell you

something that will please you. I shouldn't wonder if Caerleon has done a very good stroke of business in getting this Bill passed."

"A good stroke for himself? Naturally so."

"And for the kingdom too. Here is a regular assemblage of English papers which has just come in, and I have been looking through them to see how our proceedings are regarded. Our own men, poor beggars! are waiting for an authoritative pronouncement from the Government before saying anything; though it is easy to see that they consider Caerleon a rather dangerous lunatic at large. But the Radical papers, from which I was anticipating floods of eloquence, are checked in their wild career, most of them, by this Liquor Bill. They are nearly all committed to temperance reform at home, and they positively can't slate the first man that's courageous enough to try it, even if he is defying their dearly beloved Scythia. Of course their cry is for absolute prohibition; but none of them have been able to get so near it as even to bring about the adoption of the Scandinavian system, and though they scout the idea of compensation as unnecessary, they can't help respecting a man who sacrifices a third of his civil list to form a fund for buying up licences. The non-temperance papers are rabid, naturally. Caerleon is a faddist, and a Puritan, and an Exeter Hall autocrat, and all the rest of it. In 'Mendacity,' Dickinson calmly—or rather frantically—demands that he should be impeached, not for his temperance legislation, of course, but for poaching on Scythia's preserves. Rather a fine idea to impeach the king of a foreign country, whom you can't possibly get hold of, isn't it?"

"Then the English papers have awakened to a knowledge of our proceedings at last?" said M. Drakovics,

with rather a sickly smile. "The Government has given no indication of its policy as yet, I suppose?"

"No," returned Cyril; "but I think there is a storm brewing."

"Ah!" said M. Drakovics, quickly. "Why?"

"On account of the extraordinary number of letters which have come for Caerleon from different family friends, old comrades of my father's, and so on. The Master of his college has written, and the Bishop of Carsfield—who was head of Eton in our day—and a good many others whose names carry weight; and all their letters are in the same strain, begging him to reconsider the step he has taken, and return to England at once, while he has the chance. No doubt the Powers have begun to see that it's all very well to send notes to St James's demanding that Caerleon shall be recalled, but that St James's has no power in the matter. If the Government had sent him out, it might recall him; but he came on his own initiative, and it would only be courting a rebuff to order him back if he wouldn't come. Our men are too wise to lay themselves open to such a slight, but all the moral influence they can exercise unofficially will be brought to bear."

"Ah!" said M. Drakovics again.

"For instance," Cyril went on, "here is a long screed from Forfar, writing, as he says, not as leader of the party, but as a personal friend of Caerleon's. That's all very well; but it's quite evident that the letter is a private warning from him and the Duke——"

"What Duke?" asked M. Drakovics.

"His brother-in-law, the Duke of Old Sarum, of course," said Cyril, impatiently. "He entreats Caerleon to withdraw from Thracia immediately, and hints

how very painful it would be for the Government to be forced to take action against him. He says that he has broken through strict official usage in sending him this friendly warning, and earnestly trusts he will accept it. After this they must act as they find necessary, and he will have to take the consequences. That last little touch of menace is the Duke's, I know."

"And what does the King say? Will he take the advice proffered by all these old friends and kind people?" asked M. Drakovics, anxiously.

"Rather not!" laughed Cyril. "He means to stick to you and Thracia. No; there's only one thing that would uproot him, I think. If Forfar and the Duke had the sense to get a certain Person to write to him and request him as a favour to abdicate, and not to imperil the peace of Europe——"

"I see," said M. Drakovics, "you mean the——"

"There is no need to mention names," said Cyril. "I merely say that I am afraid Caerleon's chivalry would incline him to follow the advice of a Person in such a position, and with so much experience."

"But have they tried the expedient?" asked M. Drakovics, looking anxiously at the heap of papers on the table, as though he expected the letter of the Illustrious Personage to arrive by the ordinary post, bearing a 2½d. stamp.

"Not they!" said Cyril. "A bold, picturesque dash like that is quite undreamt of in their philosophy. But I will tell you what I have here—two more warnings. One is from a man who was at Pavelsburg with me. This is what he says: 'Dear Cill, *Que diable fait ton frère dans cette galère?* If you will take a straight tip, get him out of it as quickly as you can. I say this for auld lang syne.' The other is from Mrs Sadleir—not

a letter, simply a sentence underlined in one of these precious newspapers—"If he is wise, the so-called King will do his best to obtain recognition from Roum as soon as possible."

"Exactly," said M. Drakovics, with a ghastly smile, "and my news this morning is that there is a hitch in our negotiations with Roum. Our agent at Czarigrad has been refused an audience, while a special Scythian mission was received with peculiar warmth."

"Ah!" said Cyril, "and if the recognition is refused, you are a rebel, and Caerleon and I are filibusters. Decidedly, in such a case as this, nothing succeeds *but* success. *Allons*, monsieur! we are all in the same boat, and we may as well stick to the ship. It is possible that the Grand Signior was only trying to put Scythia off the scent. If it is so, we shall see. If not—"

The sentence was left unfinished as M. Drakovics departed shaking his head, and Cyril returned to his work of writing answers to his brother's correspondents. He had no further private conversation with the Premier until one morning several days later, when M. Drakovics entered the office in great excitement.

"Milord, we are lost! Our agent at Czarigrad telegraphs that the recognition is definitely refused. There is a *rapprochement* between Scythia and Pannonia—the Emperors have met. Secret negotiations are proceeding among the Powers, and the British Government is understood to have decided to remain neutral. There is only one thing that can save Thracia. His Majesty must marry the Princess Ottilie of Moesia."

"Indeed!" said Cyril. "What good will that do?"

"Everything. The King of Moesia is the nephew of the Grand Duke of Schwarzwald-Molzau, and that

house is connected with every reigning family in Europe. Moreover, the King, so I learn from my correspondent at Eusebia, would like the match. The Queen wishes her daughter to marry the Prince of Dardania, but he objects to him, and has more than hinted that he would prefer a son-in-law from Thracia. Again, we can offer an inducement. There is a strip of territory on our Mœsian frontier which has been ours since the last war. The people are really Mœsians by race, and give us more trouble than all our Thracians put together; but we have held fast to the territory, knowing that it would be useful as a *quid pro quo* in case we were ever desirous of obtaining a concession from Mœsia. The King would give anything to have it back, and in exchange for it we shall gain the strongest family alliance we could propose, and the help of Mœsia and the Mœsian army in case of war."

"There seems to be a good deal of the *quid pro quo* in your philosophy," said Cyril. "The difficulty will be to make Caerleon come into the scheme. How are you going to get him to propose?"

"There is no need for his Majesty to conduct the preliminary negotiations in person," said M. Drakovics, drily. "I have already telegraphed to Eusebia instructing our agent to make formal proposals to the King for the hand of the Princess."

"And this without telling Caerleon?" cried Cyril in astonishment. "Well, I don't envy you when you try to break the news to him. If he kicks you down-stairs, don't say that I didn't warn you."

"But it is you that will be kicked, milord, not I," said M. Drakovics, calmly. "His Majesty is your charge, the kingdom is mine,—that is our agreement, as you know. I have done my part in this affair by

setting on foot negotiations which will ensure the safety of the kingdom. It falls to you to bring his Majesty to acquiesce in them."

Caught in his own trap in this way, Cyril passed a very bad quarter of an hour with M. Drakovics. The elder man was resolute, the younger furious—the ground of his fury being not so much the nature of the Premier's action as the fact that he had taken it without consulting him. That M. Drakovics had exceeded his powers and got into a scrape, and was now looking to him to save him from the consequences, was Cyril's view of the case; but as often as he urged it M. Drakovics replied with perfect calmness that it had been necessary to act immediately, and that if he had consulted Cyril the latter would have hesitated to agree without first sounding his brother, a course which would have destroyed all hope of success. Finally, M. Drakovics, with a cool obstinacy which showed Cyril another reason for his being called the Bismarck instead of the Kossuth of the Balkans, reiterated his demand that Cyril should undertake to acquaint Caerleon with the part it was desired that he should play.

"You see, milord," he observed, frankly, "if the King was angry with me, and lost his temper so far as to address me rudely, or even, perhaps, to attempt to strike me, I am bound to resent it, for I represent Thracia. I should feel compelled to resign, and then Thracia is lost. But you are different, and, moreover, you are better acquainted than I am with his Majesty's character, and the best way of approaching him on such a delicate matter."

"It strikes me that my valour is the better part of your discretion," said Cyril; "but there is something in what you say. Don't imagine that I shall spare you,

though. I quite see that Caerleon ought to marry this Moesia girl—in fact, that it will probably make all the difference between success and a big smash if he does—but I don't think you have acted on the square. You needn't blame me if you are out of office this evening. Well, now to beard the lion in his den. It may as well be done at once, before an ecstatic telegram arrives from King Johann Casimir, welcoming his proposed son-in-law to his kingdom and his heart."

M. Drakovics smiled to see Cyril pause in front of one of the mirrors in the corridor as he spoke, and rearrange his tie, which had become twisted in the heat of the argument; but when he saw him put his hands in his pockets and lounge idly into Caerleon's study he understood him better. Cyril's *rôle* was to be that of absolute innocence.

Caerleon was sitting at his writing-table, busied with the reports and telegrams from Thracian agents at the various European Courts which M. Drakovics had brought for his consideration, taking care to abstract the one from Eusebia. He looked up as Cyril came in.

"Have you heard of the different blows which are about to fall on us?" he said. "Things look pretty black."

"Oh yes, Drakovics has been telling me about them," returned Cyril. "I hear that you are to act Curtius, and throw yourself into the gulf."

"By abdicating? Has Drakovics come to that already? I haven't. I don't mean to give up Thracia without a little fighting, unless they can find a better man whom the people will accept."

"Something much more heroic than abdicating. There is a lady in the case. Marriage is the gulf."

"Then I fear the gulf will remain unfilled," said Caerleon, turning back to his papers.

"Oh, that's all fudge. You know it's the only thing to be done."

"There's no need to discuss the subject," said Caerleon, coldly. "You know what I feel about it."

"But what is the good of wearing the willow all your life——?"

"I have already said that I decline to discuss the subject with you," said Caerleon, and Cyril saw that in speaking calmly he was putting a very strong constraint upon himself. He changed his tone instantly.

"Oh, very well. Of course I have no right to complain if you tell Drakovics things you won't tell me. Still, it's rather rough on a man."

"What do you mean? You know perfectly well that nothing is further from my thoughts than to discuss my private affairs with Drakovics."

"Oh, I suppose you call this a public affair," returned Cyril, with the air of a man who has neither time nor inclination for such nice distinctions. "I don't want to appear inquisitive, but perhaps you'll let me know the day when it's fixed?"

"Cyril, are you mad? or is this a particularly feeble joke? Tell me what you are driving at."

"Of course it's no business of mine," Cyril went on, unheeding; "but when you have gone so far as to authorise Drakovics to make proposals in your name for the hand of a lady, I think I might have been told."

"I send a proposal? and through Drakovics? You must be dreaming. Who is the lady?"

"Princess Ottilie of Moesia."

"A girl I have never spoken to in my life!" Caerleon's tone was one of hopeless bewilderment.

"Oh yes, you have. You danced with her at the State ball two years ago, when the Mœsias visited England, don't you remember? The King looked on and smiled approvingly, and the chaperons began to put their heads together and discuss seriously the best way of preventing foreign royalties from carrying off the biggest things in the marriage market. I believe they came to the conclusion that no princess ought ever to be allowed to marry a subject. With princes it was different, of course. You can't have forgotten?"

"I remember her—a black-eyed, rather bouncing girl. But you don't mean," and Caerleon grew hot and cold as the recollection came back to him of the chaff he had endured from his friends on account of the unmistakable favour shown him by the royal guests,— "you don't mean that they are on the track of that foolery again? They must be made to understand at once that it's absolutely impossible. You never believed it?"

"I was very glad to hear it."

"What! when you know that it's less than a month since I asked Nadia O'Malachy to marry me, and that I would willingly chuck up the kingdom to-day if she would only take me?"

"I hoped," said Cyril, deliberately, "that you regarded that affair as over and done with, and were intending to sacrifice your private feelings and do the best thing for the country."

"You thought I was intending to be a scoundrel?"

"I *wish* you would not be melodramatic," said Cyril, pathetically. "Here we are, between the devil, which is Scythia, and the deep sea of the neutrality of the other Powers, and you have the chance of settling everything on a firm foundation by marrying a very

handsome girl belonging to one of the oldest houses in Europe. I am not given to preaching, but I do say that it would be a sin not to sacrifice your feelings in such a case, and marry her. The marriage would simply be the making of you and Thracia both."

"I—will—not—do—it," said Caerleon, forcing out the words slowly.

"As for Miss O'Malachy," went on Cyril, "I give her credit for possessing much too good sense to wish to keep you a bachelor all your life for her sake. If you were to consult her, I am sure she would wish you to make a suitable marriage. In fact, I should think she has probably advised you already to do so." The blow told, for Caerleon winced at the remembrance of the advice which it had been almost harder for him to hear from her lips than for Nadia to give. "She knew perfectly well what she was doing when she refused you. It meant that you were each to go your own way in the future, with no thought of the other. If you don't marry, it will be thought you still have hopes of her."

"And what is it to you if I have?" demanded Caerleon, so fiercely that Cyril jumped. He could not think of anything to say, and presently Caerleon resumed in a quieter tone, "But I have none. She put me on my honour to stick to the kingdom, and so long as I am king she will have nothing to do with me."

"I knew she was a sensible woman!" said Cyril, triumphantly. "Now, Caerleon, let me advise you to take this thing quietly. See Princess Otilie. You haven't an idea what she is really like, and you may find her very like Miss O'Malachy——" ("I hope to goodness he won't!" he added to himself), "or she

may catch your heart at the rebound, or you may fall head over ears in love with her, and find that you really mistook your feelings last time——”

“I am so sure of my feelings,” interrupted Caerleon, “that I won’t pretend to run after another girl for anything you can offer me.”

“Then I should like to know what you mean to do,” said Cyril. “It’s not a private and personal matter; it is to save your kingdom.”

“Hang the kingdom!” cried Caerleon. “I won’t sell myself for the sake of Thracia. If I can’t be king and be a gentleman, let the kingdom go.”

“If you would only listen for a moment!” sighed Cyril. “This is what I was going to say. Take no further steps of any kind, and leave everything to Drakovics. Things can be formally arranged without your going near the girl, and the mere fact that the preliminaries are settled will do all we want. Once we are past this crisis, and Scythia and Pannonia have quarrelled again, you can pay a visit to Eusebia, and make yourself so disgustingly disagreeable that the Princess will be bound to throw you over.”

“Of all the shabby tricks!” cried Caerleon, pushing back his chair violently. “I declare, Cyril, if I didn’t know you were joking, I’d kick you out of the room. Entrap a girl into a bogus engagement for the sake of gaining a political advantage, indeed!”

“I only wish you had displayed a little of this aggressive virtue before,” said Cyril. “You quite gave Drakovics to understand, when he first offered you the crown, that you were prepared to fall in with his views on matrimony, and he has merely been acting upon that.”

“On the contrary, I disagreed with his ideas even

then," said Caerleon; "and if I hadn't, what has happened since would have put my adopting them out of the question. You ought to know that. But perhaps it was you that put Drakovics up to this business about Princess Ottile?" turning upon him sharply.

"No, on my honour," said Cyril, eagerly, relieved at being able to deny with perfect truth this direct accusation. "Drakovics is a Spartan sort of fellow, and I suppose he thinks that as soon as you are off with the old love you may as well be on with a new. It's his own idea altogether."

"I beg your pardon, old man," said Caerleon. "Everything is so crooked in this wretched place that I was even beginning to suspect you. But I am glad you had nothing to do with it. Just telephone to Drakovics to come up at once, will you?"

"Why?" asked Cyril, standing before the tube, lest his brother should resent his hesitation and insist on using it himself.

"That he may explain to the King of Moesia that he has made a mistake, of course."

"But, Caerleon, you can't do things in that way!" cried Cyril. "Think of the girl! Why, the news is public property by this time, all over Europe, and there isn't a soul that won't believe but that you have found out something against her that has made you change your mind."

"Then I will disown Drakovics's action, and say that he acted without my authority."

"Then he will resign, and you will lose the only man who possesses the confidence of the people, and can support you to any purpose at this juncture. You can't do it, Caerleon. Besides, that again is a nasty

one for the girl. Won't you see her? No one can tell what might happen then."

"If I see her, I shall simply tell her the whole story," said Caerleon, grimly. "She will have no wish to marry me after that."

"Let me tell her about the matter for you," suggested Cyril.

"No, thank you," returned his brother. "I have a pretty fair idea of the way you would speak of it—as a youthful indiscretion, of which I was ashamed. And I am not ashamed. I should be the proudest man on earth if Nadia were to be crowned with me this day two months."

"Very well," sighed Cyril. "I suppose if you will make an ass of yourself, you must. We are to arrange, then, for a personal interview, in the course of which you will, in so many words, refuse to marry Princess Ottolie?"

"There's no occasion to do anything so rude. I shall simply tell her the truth, and leave it to her to refuse me. Or I'll write to her. Yes, that's much the best plan. It will save time and a lot of difficulty."

"But you can't!" cried Cyril, with his hand on the door. "Do you mean to write to a girl who hasn't even accepted you, and tell her you won't marry her? No, you must see her, as you say, and explain things. I'll manage to get you an interview somehow, though it's against my better judgment."

"Be quick, then," cried Caerleon after him, as he went out, "for if there's any delay, I shall write to her myself."

CHAPTER XI.

A DELICATE NEGOTIATION.

"WELL?" asked M. Drakovics, anxiously, when Cyril appeared in his office. "How did his Majesty receive the news?"

"As badly as you could wish. He won't hear of marrying Princess Ottolie, and wanted to telegraph his views at once to Eusebia. However, I have got him to consent to see the lady, so that the honour of refusing him may rest with her, and if we play our cards well, that ought to give us all we want."

"How?" asked M. Drakovics, quickly.

"It will gain us time and a favourable impression, and if we can once succeed in separating Scythia and Pannonia, we ought certainly to be able to prevent their coming together again."

"Undoubtedly we ought to be able to manage that. But how do you propose to bring about a coolness between them?"

"The coolness will come of its own accord fast enough when it is understood that Caerleon is going to marry Princess Ottolie, for the Empress of Pannonia was one of the Schwarzwald-Molzaus, and they always stick together. Our business, therefore, is to produce

the impression, even if it is only a temporary one, that he is going to marry her."

"Right!" said M. Drakovics, emphatically. "And your method?"

"We are to consider it settled, I suppose, that the King of Mœsia will take kindly to the idea? Very well; then as soon as his answer is received, you must telegraph to inquire whether he will give a private audience to a confidential envoy of the highest rank, in order to discuss matters connected with the proposed marriage. He is pretty safe to consent, and then either you or I must go to Eusebia."

"But why?"

"In reality to arrange for this interview which is to end everything. But if the European public chooses to regard the mission in a different light, we cannot help it."

"Ah!" said M. Drakovics. "But you must go. I dare not leave Bellaviste at this juncture. I cannot trust the townspeople."

"Never mind," said Cyril, "I will go. It will look even better, as it is a family matter. There is no need to wait for King Johann's answer before making our preparations. If you will set about having relays of horses got ready for me at all the posting-stations, I shall be able to start as soon as things are settled."

"And you will not have to go as far as Eusebia," said M. Drakovics. "The King and Queen and Court are at Herzensruh, a country-seat which is only a few miles from our own frontier. Your idea is excellent, and yet—! Without a doubt, it would be still more effective if only we could produce the impression that the King himself was coming *incognito* to plead his own cause. I suppose it would be impossible for you to personate him?"

"Considering that there is just eight inches' difference between our heights, and that the King and Queen and Princess all know him by sight, it is probable that it would," said Cyril. "But, believe me, monsieur, my visit will serve our views better than any romantic journey Caerleon himself could make."

"What do you intend to say to King Johann?" asked M. Drakovics.

"My cue will be this. Caerleon is a very modest and retiring fellow, with an exaggerated idea of his own defects. He has been horrified to discover that proposals have been made for his marriage without his having had any opportunity of consulting privately the wishes of the Princess——"

"I see," said M. Drakovics. "You may lay as much blame on me as you like," he added, magnanimously. "I am a statesman, a plain man of business, knowing nothing of the subtleties of love-making, you perceive?"

"Precisely. Well, Caerleon cannot bring himself to believe that the Princess would be willing to accept him if she knew what he was really like. A ballroom acquaintance does not seem to him to form a sufficient foundation for a happy marriage, and he is afraid that his character and tastes might not attract the young lady's fancy. This distressing diffidence is making his life such a burden to him, that I am sent to see whether a meeting between the young people cannot be arranged before anything irrevocable is settled. Of course, when the interview has once taken place, all will come right. It would be treason to the Princess to think otherwise. You see, if it is properly put, it is rather complimentary to her than not."

"Yes; but then the meeting will destroy everything."

"But we shall have done what we wanted, and you may be sure I will mention as late a date for it as possible. And I don't despair of squaring Princess Ottolie. Caerleon has agreed to abide by her decision, and if she won't consent to refuse him, he must marry her. There's no doubt that if he told his story to King Johann, he would simply laugh at it, and the Princess might possibly do the same. But that must depend on any chance I may get of speaking to her alone. Where is the meeting to be?"

"There need be no difficulty about that. We have several matters in dispute with Dardania, and it has long been agreed that King Carlino and the Prince of Dardania should meet and talk them over under the excuse of a hunting-party. Now, our frontiers meet those of Moesia and Dardania at a spot only three or four miles from Herzensruh, and it will be the easiest possible thing for the Moesian royal family to arrange for an interview at the same time. The date and the exact details you will of course decide."

"All right," said Cyril; "but isn't it rather a pity to have the Prince of Dardania knocking about on such a delicate occasion? He might be inclined to spoil sport."

"Pooh!" cried M. Drakovics; "he may try, but he will not succeed. What chance has a prince when a king is in the way? All women are dazzled by a crown, and the Queen and her daughter will be the very first to scorn him."

"Very conveniently for us," said Cyril. "Well, we will consider that settled. Now for another highly important matter. The whole thing must be carried through with exaggerated secrecy, and yet the secret must leak out, do you see? or we shall have all our trouble for nothing."

"Certainly," said M. Drakovics. "A whisper to my agents on the various Bourses of Europe will ensure its dissemination."

"Whispers are apt to be overheard," said Cyril, "and I have a better plan. You remember Hicks, the American who gave us so much trouble over the O'Malachy business? Well, it so happens that he is spending two or three days here now after going to Bashi Konak and back. I met him last night, and he tried to pump me and find out how his Majesty was getting over his disappointment. Of course I told him nothing, only shook my head and looked knowing, and intimated that I could make startling revelations an if I would; but that is a good foundation for our business now."

"And you knew nothing at that time of all this!" said M. Drakovics, with reluctant admiration.

"Of course not; but I was not going to give myself away by saying so. What would become of diplomacy if a man said plainly when he knew nothing about a thing? Hicks is going to be as good as a news-agency to us, but he will have to find out everything for himself. You understand?"

"I am deeply interested, milord. Pray proceed."

"Well, in the evening you will bring out a special Gazette with an official announcement that the rumours which have been lately in circulation as to a *rapprochement* between us and Mœsia are wholly premature and unauthorised. Of course there are no rumours whatever, but that is a detail. There will be some soon enough after this *communiqué*, and it will stir Hicks up. Then, when it is dark, I will send down our English groom to the Hôtel Occidental, to inquire whether they can let us have two horses that are good for a hard long-distance ride next morning.

We could use our own horses, naturally, but there would be no publicity in that. He will not say where they are to go, but he will hint mysteriously at a country not far to the west of us, and he will obstinately refuse to state who is going to travel. After that, I think it will be surprising if Mr Hicks doesn't hire a window overlooking the west gate, and sit up all night to see the start."

"And then?"

"I shall take only Wright with me, but you will accompany me to the gate, mentioning loud enough to be heard that the relays of horses are ready all the way. I shall be muffled up, as though to escape recognition; but when I am abreast of Hicks the muffler will slip for a moment—quite accidentally, of course—and he will just catch a glimpse of my face. That will be enough for him, and the news will be all over Europe by the evening. I only rely on you to take no further steps without consulting me, and to keep any papers which speak of the marriage as a certainty out of Caerleon's way until I return."

"But are you able to undertake so long a ride, milord?"

"Oh, I shall do it somehow. The more dead tired I am the better the impression will be—haste and eagerness so intense, you know, and all that sort of thing. Besides, I shall take it out of Caerleon a little. He will be horribly cut up when he finds that I have undergone so much fatigue just out of tenderness for his scruples, and it ought to make him easier to manage in future. Riding hard all the way, I should be back in three days. That is quite long enough to give him a fright."

"Milord," said M. Drakovics, with deep conviction

"I am more and more thankful that it is your brother, and not you, who is King of Thracia. Hitherto I have bemoaned my hard fate in having to manage a man with a conscience; but I perceive now that compared with a man without one he is simplicity itself to deal with."

"Isn't that pretty good, from you to me?" asked Cyril with slow scorn, and the Premier shrugged his shoulders and spread forth his hands deprecatingly as he bowed himself out.

If the interests of strict morality are to be considered, it would have been well that the several portions of Cyril's scheme should not have met with the complete success which actually attended them. The appearance of the special Gazette with its enigmatical announcement created a great sensation in the city, which was heightened by the fact that the alarming foreign news of the morning had been eagerly noised abroad by Scythian sympathisers among the townspeople. Wright performed his business at the Hôtel Occidental with the most appropriate woodenness of manner, stoutly refusing to be drawn into any clear statement as to the intended destination of the travellers, but giving the necessary hints with an extensive facial contortion which he denominated a wink. Things had fallen out so well that Cyril felt a good deal of pleasurable excitement as he walked through the silent streets in the autumn twilight of the next morning but one, wondering whether Mr Hicks would be equal to the occasion. The King of Mœsia had replied with effusion, both to the first overtures made by M. Drakovics, and to the later telegram respecting the envoy, and the energetic sending of messages backwards and forwards, the news of which had in some way penetrated to the

town, had heightened the popular excitement. The horses were waiting at the west gate, under charge of a mounted police official who was to escort the travellers during the first stage of their journey, and there was a little crowd of inquisitive citizens gathered at no great distance. A thrill of triumph ran through Cyril as he recognised among them the sallow face and scanty beard of the American, and he rejoiced that virtue should not be its own sole reward in the case of Mr Hicks's early rising. He had muffled his throat and the lower part of his face in a silk scarf, and turned up his collar, and as he mounted his horse it was easy to let the scarf slip for a moment, which was all that the journalist required. He went back to the hotel with a sensation in his note-book, and Cyril rode away on his quest cheered by a pleasing consciousness of success.

Prior to this day's experiences, Wright had always entertained a deep-rooted conviction that Lord Cyril's horsemanship was far inferior to that of his brother, both as regarded skill and endurance; but now he was compelled to admit that he rode "like a Trojan," whatever that vague but evidently expressive comparison might mean. With short halts for food and change of horses, they rode on hour after hour, being handed over by their first guide to a second, and so on at every stage, and arriving at Schloss Herzensruh late at night. Cyril found himself intrusted to the care of the master of the household, who treated him with breathless consideration, and intimated that he would be admitted in the morning to an intensely private and confidential interview with King Johann, and be allowed to depart early, so as to avoid comment. The King of Mœsia had not Cyril's reasons for desiring an unauthorised publicity

for the object of his errand, and the envoy congratulated himself that he had not trusted to the enterprise of Mœsian journalists.

Morning came, and Cyril was conducted with extreme precaution to the King's private room, where there was a secretary on guard at the door, and a stalwart gamekeeper outside the window. Secrecy having been ensured by this means, King Johann greeted his guest with delight, and proceeded to lay bare to him his mind and the state of feeling in his kingdom far more thoroughly than he had any idea of doing. The impression that he produced on Cyril was that of a fussy, nervous man, half elated by the fact of his having emancipated himself from his wife's control, and half afraid of the consequences. Throughout their married life it had always been his custom to follow her advice, and his kingdom had flourished exceedingly, until a few months before, when the little rift within the lute had originated in the double question of the marriage of Princess Ottilie, the only child of the royal couple, and the succession to the crown. The constitution of Mœsia did not allow a female to occupy the throne, and there was therefore no question of the Princess's bringing that perilous dowry to her future husband; but while her mother wished her to marry the Prince of Dardania, a distant connection of her own, the King was prepared to allow her to marry any one else, but not the Prince. The reason for this difference of opinion was to be found in the fact that there was a strong party, both in the Mœsian Legislature and in the country, who desired the selection of Prince Alexis as their future ruler, anticipating that, when united with Dardania, the kingdom of Mœsia would be strong enough to strike awe even into her

triumphant rival Thracia. The members of this party were most anxious for the marriage, and the Queen supported them with the calm determination which had always hitherto had its due weight with her more hasty husband; but some time after the affair had been considered as settled, its course was interrupted by an alien influence, wielded by the King's uncle, the reigning Grand-Duke of Schwarzwald-Molzau. He had always regarded the kingdom of Mœsia as a snug preserve for one of the many cadets of his house, and it did not suit him at all that his plans should be crossed. Emissaries from Molzau were despatched to Mœsia, the King was invited to revisit the cradle of his race, and both there and in his own court he was cajoled, threatened, flattered, and bribed until he refused his consent to the projected marriage. The Queen was at first incredulous,—it seemed impossible that her power could have vanished with such suddenness; but the Schwarzwald-Molzaus had parted husband and wife only too effectually, and an armed neutrality now existed between them.

This was the state of affairs in Mœsia, when M. Drakovics replied to King Johann's half-veiled hints as to the desirability of a closer alliance between the two kingdoms by the formal demand of Princess Ottilie's hand for Caerleon—a demand which the monarch had hastened with somewhat unkingly eagerness to grant. With the Princess safely married to some one else, the Prince of Dardania would be deprived of one of the chief influences on which he relied for support in his candidature for the throne, while there was no fear that the Mœsians would ever elect Caerleon as their sovereign. The mutual hatred between Mœsia and Thracia was far too great for the two nations to

consent to be united under any circumstances, and this left the way clear for the formal adoption by the reigning sovereign, and subsequent accession to the Mœsian throne, of one of the younger princes of the house of Schwarzwald-Molzau.

The first question of importance to be discussed between King Johann and his guest was that of the treaty, as to the provisions of which the King was nervously anxious. In fact, he was depending upon the acquisition of the disputed strip of country as a means of reconciling his subjects to the Thracian alliance, and preventing their mourning over the discomfiture of their favourite, Prince Alexis. Hence, although he heard it with wonder, he accepted with avidity the suggestion which Cyril had arranged with M. Drakovics should be made. In order to avoid the unpleasant savour of a bargain, in which the Princess would be handed over in return for the tract of land, the treaty respecting the disputed territory was to be drawn up and signed before any public announcement was made as to the marriage. The King did not appear to consider that it was less objectionable for his daughter to act as a seal upon the treaty than as an equivalent in it; but he grasped eagerly at the offer, and Cyril, who had been representing in the highest possible light the delicacy of his brother's feelings, and the absolute certainty of his refusing to countenance anything in the nature of a bargain, heaved a sigh of unfeigned relief.

"This gives us a hold on the old fellow if the wedding doesn't come off after all," he thought, while the King was hugging himself in the idea that he had just achieved one of the most astute strokes of policy of modern times. It was agreed that the treaty

should be signed as soon as it could be formally drawn up, and when King Johann suggested that this ratification might well take place at a personal meeting of the two sovereigns on the disputed territory, Cyril found the necessary opening for imparting the real object of his journey. The King listened in astonishment as he unfolded his story of Caerleon's excessive humility, and his determination to consult the wishes of the Princess before he would consider himself engaged to her.

"But this is absurd—romantic!" cried the King. "It is a piece of the Middle Ages. Naturally the girl will accept him when she has been instructed to do so. Why should she not? His fears are preposterous."

"That is exactly my own view, sir," said Cyril, in the tone of one whose endurance had been taxed to the utmost; "but I regret to say that I cannot enforce it upon my brother. However, after what your Majesty has just said of the docile disposition of her Royal Highness, I hope the matter will prove to be merely a form."

"There is no doubt of that," said the king, hastily. "If the King of Thracia is bent upon taking this course I must allow it, although he will find it a very bad precedent,—undermining his authority, admitting doubts as to his power, and so on. But I will give my daughter her orders, and the Queen and she both know by this time that it will be the worse for her if she does not obey."

The irrepressible triumph which animated these words betrayed the exultation of the weak-minded man who had gained a victory over a strong-minded woman; but Cyril discreetly took no notice of the tone, wondering only whether the King had intended to conduct his

daughter by main force to the altar, and whether he imagined his auditor to be labouring under the delusion that the marriage would be a voluntary one on the part of Princess Ottolie. It was agreed that the important interview should take place the day after the signing of the treaty, at a hunting-party to be given by the King at Schloss Herzensruh, the previous day's business having been conducted on the strip of territory which belonged at present to Thracia, but which would pass to Moesia by the treaty. This settled, the King rose, and signed to Cyril to accompany him.

"Now that is all arranged, I will present you to the Queen and the Princess," he said; and Cyril, divining that the presentation was intended as a token of defiance to the Queen, followed him from the room with lively interest as he marched across the corridor and entered by the door which a servant threw open.

"This is the Lord Cyril Mortimer, brother and envoy extraordinary of the King of Thracia," announced King Johann, in a voice which was in itself a declaration of war; but Cyril saw at a glance that the Queen and her daughter had no intention of taking up the gauntlet. Both were perfectly calm and very friendly, and inquired graciously after people they had met in England. Princess Ottolie was taller and thinner than when he had last seen her, and it struck him that she had lost the loud manner which had aroused Caerleon's dislike. She was growing more like her mother; but Cyril felt that it would be long before the impulsive dark-eyed girl would attain to the stately calmness of the un-intellectual, placid-looking lady who was said to possess one of the wisest heads in Europe. She had foiled M. Drakovics once, at a period of acute crisis, and the Thracian Premier had never forgiven her for her vic-

tory, although he was wont to consider it a feather in his cap, as in that of the statesman whom he most wished to resemble, that he had all the ladies against him. A few minutes' confidential communication with the Queen would throw light on many things, Cyril thought; but this was impossible so long as the King remained in the room, moving about uneasily. Her parting words, however, surprised him not a little.

"Tell his Majesty that I am looking forward to renewing my acquaintance with him," she said. "Among our many English friends, there is none that I remember with so much admiration. I feel that one can have the most perfect confidence in him."

"Your Majesty is too good," said Cyril, astonished. "I am sure my brother has never ventured to hope that he held such a place in your recollection."

"He is the most perfect gentleman I ever knew," she said emphatically, and Cyril pondered over her words as he rode away from the castle. The last sentence he felt at liberty to disregard. It was a taunt flung at her husband by the Queen as a reply to his challenge; but he scented danger in the expressions she had used at first.

"She's up to something," he said to himself, "but I can't for the life of me see what it is. It's all very well for Drakovics to say that women will do such and such things; but that's where he and fellows of his stamp always go wrong—in imagining that they can generalise about women. It's scarcely ever possible to judge of a woman's probable conduct from precedents. She is quite capable of striking out a new line each time. I wonder now whether the Queen thinks she will be able to get round the old man, and make him break off the match? Well, so long as we get the

treaty signed, and they don't set to work too soon, it doesn't much matter. If only the King had not hung about as he did, I could have found out a good many interesting things. But he was afraid they would let on about Prince Alexis, and so he has effectually stopped my giving the Princess a warning as to Caerleon's little game. It's his own fault if the scheme goes wrong. I wonder whether he will be able to carry through the business with Pannonia properly."

This unpleasant doubt exercised Cyril's mind frequently during his long ride. He had devoted the concluding portion of his interview with the King to coaching him delicately for the part he was to play, without actually making any suggestions as to the means to be used. King Johann flattered himself that he was an accomplished diplomatist, but his young visitor could scarcely have ventured to leave him to act alone if he had not felt the issue to be so clear that the worst bungling could hardly succeed in obscuring it. The King's duty was merely to intimate to his uncle, the Grand-Duke of Schwarzwald-Molzau, that if Caerleon's position in Europe were secured, and he were allowed to marry Princess Ottilie, the succession to the Moesian throne would be left open for one of the younger princes of the parent house. There could be little doubt that he would welcome the suggestion, and contrive to bring about the desired change in the policy of the Powers by influencing Pannonian diplomacy through his daughter the Empress. Thus Cyril's mind was tolerably at ease when, after nearly a day and a half of riding—for he had started too late to complete the return journey in one day—he reached the neighbourhood of Bellaviste. They were passing through a

small village when the first distant glimpse of the city was obtained, and Wright urged his horse up to Cyril's.

"Beg your pardon, my lord, but p'raps you'd like to rest 'ere for a hour or so, and give these 'ere 'orses a feed and a bit of a rub-down. It looks as though we didn't know 'ow to treat a 'orse to bring 'im in like this, and me always a-jawin' the stable-boys about it."

"I am sorry that the stable-boys will have to lose their object-lesson to-day, Wright," said Cyril, with a smile of the utmost gentleness, "for it is important for us to hurry. But you need not think I am ashamed of the state the horses are in. If you like to ride yours through the next puddle, and get him well splashed, I have no objection."

Wright touched his hat, and fell back with an inarticulate grunt, making no attempt to profit by the permission accorded him. At Schloss Herzensruh he had fallen in with a fellow-exile in the person of King Johann's coachman, who was also an Englishman, and he had informed him, in the course of a long and generally lugubrious exchange of confidences, that "a straighter rider than 'is Majesty, nor a pleasanter master, I don't wish to see—and it do take something like a 'orse to carry 'is Majesty," he added with professional pride; "but Lord Cyril—there! 'e's beyond me." Cyril smiled to himself over the groom's look of bewilderment as he rode on, and reflected that it would have been a thousand pities to spoil the effect of their return by care for the appearance of the horses. As it was, when the dusty and travel-stained riders and their weary beasts entered the gates of Bellaviste, they created a sensation. A keen curiosity had been rife ever since Cyril's departure, to account for which the wildest theories had been started, and his return

promised fresh interest to the townsfolk. They gathered about him in crowds, and inquired anxiously the object of his journey, and whether all was well. To the first question he professed himself unable to give an answer; but on the subject of the second he was able to reassure his questioners, although the most audacious hints as to the King's possible marriage could gain no confirmation from his lips until he met Mr Hicks.

"Well, Lord Cyril, guess his Majesty's about got over his disappointment, anyway?" remarked the journalist confidentially.

Cyril responded in two words of the American's own language, "You bet!" and rode on to the palace. Dismounting hastily, he forbade the servants to announce him, and hurrying up the steps, staggered into Caerleon's study, and collapsed upon the sofa.

"What! back already?" said Caerleon, looking up from his papers.

Cyril sat up. "*Already!*" he remarked, tragically; "I have ridden night and day for the sake of a fad of yours, and this is all I get for it!"

"My dear fellow, what made you do such a thing?" cried Caerleon, rising and coming towards him. "I never thought of your rushing to Moesia and back like this. We shall have you ill again. Let me get you some brandy."

"You had better call one of the servants, and let me give the order," said Cyril, with crushing irony. "You are a temperance man. Well, at any rate I hope you will be pleased to know that I have made arrangements for you to meet the Princess."

"Is it really necessary for me to meet her?" asked Caerleon, anxiously. "I have been hoping you

would manage to nip the scheme in the bud without that."

"When you forbade me to mention the matter!" cried Cyril, with natural indignation. "I had plenty of opportunities for telling the King your story, but you had hinted that I should misrepresent it, so I said nothing. Of course I did the wrong thing. Well, I have done all I can, and I am dead beat. Just let me alone, that's all I want."

He turned over on the sofa and went to sleep, for it was perfectly true that he was very tired after the three days' ride, while Caerleon stood looking at him in much apprehension and self-reproach. To cover his brother with a rug and send for the Court physician to see him were obviously the only things for the King to do; but when the doctor averred that there was nothing amiss with the patient but fatigue, and prescribed merely rest and mental relaxation, he could not accept the comfort thus conveyed. When Cyril had been roused with much difficulty from the sofa, and persuaded to go to bed, Caerleon went round to the stables to speak to Wright, whom he found engaged in superintending the grooming of one of the horses, which he conceived had been neglected during his absence.

"Glad to see you looking so fit, Wright," said his master, as Wright straightened himself against the wall, and touched his cap. "I was afraid I should find you dead beat. Lord Cyril seems to be tired out."

"Do 'e, your Majesty?" responded Wright. "I 'adn't noticed it. If you'll believe me, I think as 'is lordship's 'avin' a little joke with you. 'E's always tryin' on them sort of games, beggin' your Majesty's pardon."

This was added as an afterthought, in response to Caerleon's look of astonishment, as the King turned on his heel, and walked away in displeasure. Wright was getting disgustingly impudent, he reflected. No doubt too much had been made of him, and he felt that he had a right to put on side, as the only Englishman among the servants, but he must be taught his place. Caerleon was painfully conscious that there was not always a complete unity of aims and agreement as to means between Cyril and himself, but that Wright should venture to notice the fact was insufferable. He should learn that being the King's fellow-countryman did not necessarily make him his confidant, and a studied repressiveness of manner in addressing him for some days would go far to make him forget that he had been chosen as Cyril's sole companion on his important mission—an honour which seemed to have encouraged him to presume. And upon this decision Caerleon proceeded to act, to the signal discomfiture of Wright, whose natural enemies the stable-boys asserted themselves unmercifully when they saw that the royal favour had forsaken him.

Cyril, in the meantime, was enjoying himself. In obedience to the orders of the physician, he spent several days on a sofa in his room, and had all the papers brought him for his amusement. In this way he was enabled to exercise a very effectual press censorship, weeding the journals carefully, and sending down for Caerleon's perusal only such old-fashioned and painfully respectable prints as never hint at an approaching royal marriage until the betrothal is actually announced. Thanks to Mr Hicks, all the more modern and go-ahead papers were teeming with reports and rumours on the subject of an anticipated

Mœsio-Thracian alliance, and two days after his return Cyril noted with satisfaction a paragraph in a semi-official German paper to the effect that the Emperor of Pannonia appeared inclined to recede from the policy he had adopted of giving Scythia a free hand with regard to Thracia, and to maintain an attitude of reserve. This in itself was cheering, but for several days the situation continued to be extremely unsettled, constant rumours of *rapprochements* and coolnesses coming to make matters doubtful. At last it was accepted as fairly certain that Scythia and Pannonia were unable to agree on the Thracian question, and that neither would trust the other to interfere; but before things had reached this dead-lock, which left matters as they had been before the two countries had arrived at their temporary agreement, Cyril had received a cipher message from King Johann Casimir to say that all was well.

This prepared the way for the signing of the treaty, which M. Drakovics had been drafting in accordance with Cyril's notes of his conversation with the Mœsian sovereign; and when everything was ready, Caerleon and Cyril left Bellaviste for the frontier, in order to entertain the Prince of Dardania for a week's hunting. The visit was a purely informal one, M. Drakovics only coming down twice to discuss various questions of policy, and the little party in the hunting-lodge found their stay very pleasant. The Prince of Dardania was young and athletic, and a mighty hunter, and displayed as much delight over his escape from the cares of State and the supervision of his Prime Minister as did Caerleon. The two became great friends, and their intimacy caused Cyril much apprehension, owing to his constant fear that they might discuss together

the situation with respect to Mœsia. He gave himself endless trouble, and caught several colds, in accompanying them on all their expeditions, when he would much rather have remained sitting over the fire at the hunting-lodge or lounging about the little village; but he felt the absolute necessity of preventing their coming to an understanding. He knew that he was a hindrance to their enjoyment, for long walks were obliged to be curtailed, and bridges sought instead of fords, in consideration of his physical weakness; but Caerleon could not bring himself to suggest that he should remain at home, and Prince Alexis smiled and said nothing.

At times it struck Cyril that all his trouble was unnecessary, for that the Prince could not be aware that Caerleon was his rival; but it seemed impossible that the European gossip as to the approaching disposal of Princess Ottolie's hand should not have reached his ears. More than once, also, Cyril caught him looking Caerleon over, in a musing, business-like fashion, as though he were taking stock of him, and after moments such as this he always redoubled his efforts to keep the two from being alone together. He felt sure that Prince Alexis knew what was going on when, in response to a question from Caerleon as to whether he intended to join the hunting-party at Schloss Herzensruh the day after the signing of the treaty, he replied that he could not well intrude on the King of Mœsia at such a purely family gathering, but that he would no doubt be able to pay his respects later. And yet it seemed strange that he made no attempt to win Caerleon over to his side, a fact which left Cyril still troubled by uncertainty, even after the treaty was signed. The points of difficulty between

Thracia and Dardania had been satisfactorily arranged by the two sovereigns and their Ministers, and they were incorporated into an addition to the Mœsian treaty, although Cyril almost feared that the negotiations would fall through when he saw the meeting between King Johann Casimir and Prince Alexis. The King's manner was nervously triumphant, and inclined to be unfriendly, and most men would have taken offence at it, especially after the rupture which had already occurred between them; but the Prince passed it by without notice, and all went off peaceably.

CHAPTER XII.

TO OBLIGE A LADY.

THE next day was that appointed for the fateful hunting-party, and when Caerleon and Cyril bade farewell to Prince Alexis, who was returning for a few days to his capital of Bashi Konak, they were both conscious of concealing a good deal of excitement under a veil of calmness. Cyril fancied that there was a twinkle in the Prince's eye as he wished them good sport, and he was roused again to wonder whether their guest knew anything of the affair in hand. However this might be, he departed without making any allusion to it, and Cyril awoke to the fact that Caerleon, who now realised for the first time the full falseness of his position, was in a state of misery and nervousness only to be described as pitiable. When Cyril recognised this fact he was appalled, for it seemed to him that the mere sight of his brother's face was enough to betray to King Johann the artifice which had been employed against him; but presently he reflected that Caerleon's disquietude and evident unhappiness fitted in exactly with the story he had told the King, and his mind was at ease as they rode through the forest together. At Schloss Herzensruh every one was waiting to start for

the forest, and the lawn in front of the windows was occupied by a confused group of jägers, dogs, and beaters. The Queen did not appear on this occasion, but the King hurried to greet the brothers, and presented Caerleon at once to Princess Otilie, who was looking sportsmanlike and ready for business in a French *costume de chasse*, with leather-faced skirt and many-pocketed jacket all complete, while a jäger behind her was holding her neat little rifle.

"I know how fond of sport you English are, and therefore I gave my daughter directions to wear this dress to-day in compliment to your brother," said the King, complacently, to Cyril, when they had withdrawn a step or two from the pair, leaving Caerleon to devise and utter incoherent remarks on the weather, which were received by the Princess with demure politeness.

"And Caerleon bars a shooting woman above all things!" was Cyril's agonised mental comment, even while he was assuring the King that although the Princess would look charming in anything, she was absolutely irresistible in hunting costume. But as he spoke, his thoughts were wandering, for it struck him that Princess Otilie appeared to be very favourably inclined towards Caerleon. There was a hint of pleased excitement in her manner, which even the delight of wearing the most *chic* and becoming of new dresses seemed inadequate to produce ; and when, in response to one of her companion's laboured remarks, she raised her eyes smilingly and scanned his face, it appeared to Cyril that the expression in them was more than friendly. The thought almost made him giddy. What if the whim of a strong-willed, fickle girl should succeed in doing what he and M. Drakovics, with all their

statesmanship, had failed to achieve, and bring about Caerleon's marriage with her ? Although he had suggested the possibility of such a thing in order to comfort the Premier, he had never regarded it seriously himself ; but now it struck him as by no means unlikely that Princess Otilie might refuse to grant her unwilling suitor the dismissal he craved, in which case, Cyril decided, his brother would feel himself compelled to marry her. At this point the voice of King Johann broke in on his meditations.

"I am about to desire my daughter to show his Majesty the path through the forest which leads to the withered pine, a familiar landmark here," said the King. "You and I will then lead the hunt in the opposite direction."

"Excuse me," said Cyril, hastily, "but I am afraid that such evident assistance would simply render my brother incapable of addressing himself to her Royal Highness at all. If we keep to our present order, your Majesty and I and the servants can easily turn into a fresh path when we are once in the wood."

The King agreed to this plan, although not without some hesitation, and Cyril manœuvred the army of beaters so adroitly that before they had been ten minutes in the forest Caerleon and the Princess found themselves alone. The result of the discovery was absolutely to deprive Caerleon of the power of speech, and he walked on in silence beside his companion, who was firing off nervous little sentences at intervals. We are told, by those who should be well qualified to speak on the subject, that words are apt to fail him who desires to offer his hand and heart to the girl of his choice ; but what is his difficulty compared with that of the man who finds it his duty to explain to an

expectant lady why he does *not* propose? The cold sweat stood on Caerleon's brow as the Princess ceased her spasmodic remarks abruptly, and appeared from her silence to be expecting him to speak; but after an awful five minutes, in the course of which he twice cleared his throat and made a vain attempt to say something—it did not matter what—she herself, to his astonishment, broke the ice.

"I—I have something to say to your Majesty," she began. "You have come here with the intention of—of marrying me—"

This was more and more terrible. It rushed into Caerleon's tortured mind that Princess Ottile must belong to a German variety of the New Woman, and that she was going to propose to him. How was he to manage to refuse her? She must be stopped at any cost.

"On the contrary," he interrupted, floundering desperately into what he had to say—"your Highness is mistaken. I have no desire—no intention—no—no hope of marrying you."

"Indeed!" cried Princess Ottile, facing him with crimson cheeks and flashing eyes. "Then pray understand that your feelings are entirely reciprocated. I have no desire—no intention of marrying your Majesty," and she made him an elaborate curtsey, which was rather incongruous when taken in conjunction with her gaiters and short skirts. But Caerleon was far too deeply impressed with the conviction that he had blundered horribly in beginning his delicate task to notice anything of the kind.

"I assure you," he said, earnestly, "that nothing could be further from my mind than to wish to insult your Royal Highness. I can only ask you to pardon

my bungling way of expressing myself. I came here intending to throw myself upon your mercy, and beg you to release me from an engagement which was entered into without my consent."

Princess Ottolie still stood angry and irresolute, darting distrustful glances at him, but it seemed to Caerleon that she was more disposed to listen than at first. He hurried on—

"I will speak to you freely, Princess—not that I am ashamed of what I have to say; quite the contrary. There is a lady whom I love, and whom I would give anything to marry. But she has refused me—she is not of royal blood, and she considers that it would be prejudicial to the interests of Thracia were she to marry me. I have no hope of getting her to change her mind so long as I remain on the throne, but I will never marry any one else. It would be perjury. When I heard that Drakovics had set on foot negotiations for my marriage with you I was horror-struck, and tried to break them off at once. But it was pointed out to me that this might seem to cast a slur on you, and so—I didn't do it. I think you will see that if I acted wrongly it was because I was desirous of doing nothing to hurt your feelings. I am truly sorry if what I said at first sounded rude, but I was anxious to get you to refuse me. You see that I could not possibly marry you, since I love Nadia."

"Nadia—is that her name?" asked the Princess, sharply. She had been standing motionless, biting her glove, during Caerleon's laboured and stammering harangue, her brows contracted into an anxious frown, but now her face relaxed. "I like to hear you say it. Your voice sounds as if you loved her. If I wished to tease you, I might insist on holding you to your engage-

ment, but I don't, for"—and she mimicked the words he had uttered some minutes before—"I also came here intending to throw myself on your mercy, and beg you to release me from an engagement which was entered into without my consent. Only," and her voice took a tone of entreaty, "I have more to ask than you."

"If I can help you in any way, pray command me," said Caerleon, inexpressibly relieved to find himself transformed from a suppliant into a possible benefactor.

Princess Ottolie smiled anxiously. "You don't know what you are promising, but I shall hold you to your offer. I am going to confide to you something that no one knows except my mother. It is she who has advised me to consult you, for she has the greatest confidence in your honour and discretion."

This was spoken very quickly, as if it was a lesson, and Caerleon could only say that, in so far as it rested with him, the Queen and Princess should have no cause to repent of the honour they were doing him.

Almost before the words were out of his mouth, the girl went on speaking hurriedly, walking fast with her face turned away from him, and her hands twisting themselves nervously together: "I also have a romance, your Majesty—a love-story, you call it. After I had visited England with my parents two years ago, we spent some weeks at Pavelsburg, and there I met some one—a distant relation of my mother's. All these political troubles had not happened then"—she looked up at him piteously—"and I might follow the dictates of my own heart. My father and mother were delighted; the Emperor was pleased. We could not help loving one another; but what happened afterwards would not have seemed so hard if all had not been so

bright at first. He had spoken to my mother; she had told my father; but our engagement was not to be announced until we returned home, and the betrothal could take place publicly. But when we reached Eusebia, everything was changed. Your revolution—the Thracian revolution—had taken place; Scythia and Pannonia had quarrelled; the statesmen were playing chess on the map of Europe, and he and I were two of the pawns. He is related to the imperial family of Scythia, and Pannonia could not allow Scythian influence in the Balkans to be strengthened by his marriage with me. They did not tell us plainly that our duty compelled us to part,—they worked underground, through the Grand Duke, my father's uncle; they sowed dissension between my father and mother; they made our home miserable; they have parted my Prince and me. That is my story, and no one has any pity for us."

She paused and wrung her hands, her dark eyes searching Caerleon's face, her lips quivering painfully.

"Don't cry," he said in alarm. "If I can help you I will. What is it that you want me to do?"

"There is no one I can trust, no one who will help me. My father orders me to marry you, and Pannonia and the whole of our own family are behind him. I could not escape; they would track me all over the world. My only hope is to divert their attention altogether for a time—for a few days, and so to obtain the chance of marrying my Prince."

"But who is he—this happy man?" asked Caerleon.

"Alexis Alexievitch," she replied, with a vivid blush.

"The Prince of Dardania!" cried Caerleon. "Why, we have been hunting together for a week, and he has never said a word about this."

"He was to leave it all to me, unless he found some unexpected opportunity," said the Princess. "He is making all the preparations. It is a difficult matter, because we must be married both by Greek and Lutheran rites, and he has found it best to bring a pastor from Weldart, from my mother's people. The pastor cannot arrive for a week, and we must bridge over that time until I can escape into Dardanian territory, and be married. Now, do you see what I want you to do?"

"I really don't," said Caerleon, the wildest ideas of personation, elopement, and abduction chasing one another through his brain.

"I should have thought it was simple enough," said the Princess, with a certain amount of contempt. "That week must be filled up, and therefore I want you to engage yourself to me for that time."

"Oh!" said Caerleon, stupidly. "But I thought you made a very solemn ceremony of your betrothals here?"

"And you think your Mdlle. Nadia might object? Well, I will promise you by anything you like that I will not hold you to the engagement."

"It's not that," he said, gruffly. "I am not going to tell a pack of lies."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Princess in her turn. "But I'm afraid I can't tell them for you. Do you really mind going through the form of betrothal, knowing that neither of us means it? You can say the words without intention, or with a mental reservation, you know. No? Well, I see what we must do. The betrothal must be put off for a week. I have sent for a new dress from Paris, and I will not appear at the ceremony until I have it to wear. My father will

allow that plea. Have you not noticed that men who will calmly break a woman's heart in a great matter, will let her have her way without difficulty in a little one, especially if it has anything to do with dress? It will be generally understood that we are engaged, and that will put the Schwarzwald-Molzaus off the scent."

"But I can't say that I want to marry you when I don't," objected Caerleon.

"Did they teach your Majesty that story about George Washington very carefully when you were a little boy? I have toiled through his history often, but it never left such a deep impression on me. Very well, you must say that you will marry me if I am willing, and I will say the same about you. That will make us both safe."

"But, excuse me," said Caerleon, "is all this really necessary? Don't you think that if I spoke to your father, and told him what your feelings were, and interceded with him on behalf of Prince Alexis, he might relent?"

Princess Ottile's eyes flashed. "Your Majesty," she said, "my mother went down on her knees to my father to entreat his pity for me, his only child, and without avail. Do you think that a stranger's intercessions would have more effect on him?"

"But have you tried telling him that your happiness depends on this marriage, and refusing to have anything to say to any one but the Prince?"

"No; I have not done so lately," said the Princess, in a peculiar tone. "I did at first; but do you know what the consequence would have been if I had persisted? They would have banished my mother from the kingdom, or imprisoned her in a fortress, and what could I have done then? Therefore I said no more.

Of late we have endeavoured to appear resigned to our fate, confiding in your honour and generosity."

"But would it not put things right if I were to withdraw from my proposal at once?"

"So far right that my father would oblige me to marry one of my cousins, the Schwarzwald-Molzaus, instead of you, and I could look for no mercy from him. You must help me. You cannot leave me to my misery, when I have trusted you in this way. Help me for the sake of your own Nadia, as you would wish another man to help her if she were in my place. Oh, your Majesty, you cannot refuse me!"

"Very well. I'll do what I can," said Caerleon, rather grudgingly, as it seemed even to himself, but the idea of the suggested deception was hateful to him.

"And you will tell no one what has passed between us?"

"Of course I won't repeat your confidences without your permission."

"Not even to your brother?"

"Not even to him, if you would rather not, though I don't think I have ever kept anything secret from him before."

"Your brother above all," repeated the Princess, emphatically. "On your honour?"

"You don't seem to trust him," said Caerleon, feeling hurt.

"Not at all. It is simply that I owe him a little grudge. You know that he visited my father here nearly three weeks ago? I want to play him a trick in return for some things he did then. You understand, it is a whim of mine?"

"Yes," returned Caerleon, only half satisfied.

"Ah! well, your Majesty, we are engaged—for a

week. It will be necessary for us to appear in public together, but I will do my best not to be a very exacting companion. I know that you English do not make as much of betrothal as we Molzäuers do. Still, one must keep up appearances. I look to you to play your part."

"In this way?" asked Caerleon, provoked by her mischievous tone, as he raised her hand to his lips.

"Ah, that is your custom? We in Germany should think it a little cold. If anything more is requisite, pray do the proper thing, without considering my feelings."

"If my brother was here he would make a pretty speech about the honour's being too great for safety," said Caerleon. "I am not a good hand at compliments, and so, Princess, I must simply ask you not to tempt me."

"Which is a polite way of saying that you decline the honour," said the Princess, pouting slightly, and trying to withdraw her hand. At this interesting moment King Johann and Cyril, followed by the jägers, appeared at the end of the path. Cyril and the servants drew back hastily, but the King advanced with much dignity, and approached the pair.

"Is it possible that the dearest wish of my heart is granted me?" he asked in a voice broken by emotion. "You have arrived at an understanding?"

"If the Princess will take me, I hope—er—er—I am ready—er—I will marry her," stammered Caerleon.

"And if his Majesty will have me, I shall welcome the honour of marrying him," said Princess Otilie boldly, a mischievous light in her black eyes.

"Then you really are engaged to her?" asked Cyril,

incredulously, when the brothers next found themselves alone together.

"I suppose so," returned Caerleon, gruffly enough.

"Well I am most extraordinarily delighted to hear it, of course. Congrats. and all that sort of thing, old man. I suppose she wouldn't let you off?"

"That's about it."

"You ought to feel flattered by that, at any rate. She's an awfully good-looking girl,—any amount of go in her. I shouldn't wonder if you find her rather overpowering though, just at first. I'll take her off your hands now and then if you do. She'll think a heap more of you if you are busy sometimes."

"I should have thought you would have recommended me to try and get used to her if I have got to marry her," growled Caerleon.

Cyril laughed.

"What, in these progressive days?" he asked. "You are behind the age, old man. You will contrive to exist very happily together by making sure of never finding yourselves in the same place at the same time." And he went away to draw up an official announcement to be sent to M. Drakovics for insertion in a special Gazette, stigmatising the circumstantial reports which had appeared of late on the subject of the King's approaching marriage as absurdly premature, since the date even of the betrothal was not yet fixed. As for Caerleon, he prepared with a failing heart for his interview with the Queen, who had expressed a desire to see her daughter's *fiancé*. The King himself led him into the boudoir where the Queen sat knitting, and was much relieved to see her kiss him on the forehead when he stooped to kiss her hand. He had feared that although Princess Ottolie had proved unexpectedly pliable, her

mother would be more difficult to persuade; and he ascribed the gratifying reality partly to the Queen's sense of his own masterful personality, and partly to the liking she had already expressed for her future son-in-law. Pitying the young man's evident shyness and misery, King Johann volunteered to leave him alone with the Queen for a time lest his presence should prove a restraint on their mutual confidences, and the moment that he had left the room the Queen dropped her knitting and sat upright.

"I can never thank you sufficiently for what you have done to-day," she said, in a quick sharp whisper. "You have helped me to save my child."

"I am very glad if I have been so fortunate as to please you," said Caerleon, lamely.

"My daughter has told me your story," the Queen went on. "Your confidence in her has touched us both extremely. If ever I can in any way serve or befriend the young lady whom you love, I rely upon you to turn to me without hesitation."

"Your Majesty is too good," stammered Caerleon.

"There is one thing I wish to say while we are alone," continued the Queen, rapidly. "It is uncertain when Prince Alexis will be able to complete the arrangements for the wedding, and even when I know the day I will not tell you. You are to be completely ignorant. The news must surprise you as much as any one. I am afraid that your engagement must last at least eight days; but you know that it is not now proposed to celebrate the betrothal until ten days hence. I hope you will not find the time very irksome, but my child is a little wayward occasionally. Here comes the King."

When Caerleon went out from the Queen's boudoir,

with the King's arm in his, it was to begin the most horrible fortnight of his life. If he had done wrong in yielding to Princess Ottolie's entreaties, he was amply punished for it as the days went on. He loathed the idea of deceiving the King, tyrannical and weak-minded though he was; he loathed the delighted congratulations which came pouring in through M. Drakovics from all Thracia as soon as it became known that the date of the betrothal was actually fixed. He was deceiving the man whose bread he was eating, for on the return from the hunt the King had insisted that the brothers should take up their quarters at Schloss Herzensruh; he was deceiving Cyril, who had never, so he fondly believed, concealed a thought from him; he was deceiving his simple-minded subjects, and he was laying up a store of self-loathing which became in course of time almost unbearable. And, worst of all, he was turning his back on Nadia, forsaking her, and, so far as the world could see, preparing to marry another girl, exactly as she had begged him to do, and prophesied that he would do. This last aspect of the case would have made the situation intolerable to a woman, but Caerleon was possessed of a dogged patience which forced him to go on to the bitter end, having once given his promise to Princess Ottolie. But he discovered very soon that, although it had been easy enough to offer her his help in the forest, with her tearful eyes fixed upon him and her indignant voice ringing in his ears, it was much more difficult to carry out his promise gracefully.

He did his best, although it must be confessed that that best was but poor. When Cyril suggested mildly that it was usual to send presents to the lady in the course of an engagement, he followed his advice, and telegraphed to Paris and Vienna orders for jewellery

and objects of art ; but he did so with the bitter recollection that he had never given Nadia so much as a keepsake, while here he was showering costly gifts upon a girl for whom he did not care a straw. It was the same with the rides, on which it was the Princess's will and pleasure that he should accompany her at least once a-day. He had never had the chance of riding with Nadia ; but he had little opportunity of forgetting that Princess Ottolie had a splendid seat, and rode like an Englishwoman, as Cyril told her once, assuring her at the same time that it was the highest compliment he could pay her. At first, indeed, Caerleon welcomed the prospect of the rides, as likely to restrict his intercourse with his *fiancée* to the polite and friendly terms on which he felt it was both right and reasonable they should meet. But he had reckoned without Princess Ottolie, even as he had left out of his calculations the enterprising photographers who travelled from Bellaviste and Eusebia, and arranged cameras in ambush by the side of the road along which the riders were to pass, and the enthusiastic amateurs who took snap-shots at them with kodaks. The Princess had eyes like a hawk, and could detect the most artfully concealed camera some minutes before she came abreast of it, and distinguish a photographic maniac at any distance, and at the crucial moment she would begin a confidential low-toned conversation, which obliged Caerleon to lean politely towards her in order to hear what she said ; or she would drop her riding-whip. It was against his principles, she had discovered, to allow the groom to pick it up, and thus she had the pleasure of seeing him dismount and rescue it himself, while the lurking enemy gloated over the negative he had secured, which was destined to appear after the lapse of a week or two, in

a more or less appalling guise, in one of the Continental illustrated journals.

"It isn't the riding I mind, but I do bar her tricks," Caerleon bemoaned himself one day to Cyril, who had witnessed an incident of this kind.

"Never mind," said Cyril. "She only wants to show you off."

"If she carries on much more, I shall cut," said the victim, gloomily.

"Beastly mean, if you do," said Cyril. "The girl's awfully gone on you. When I get her alone sometimes, and sing your praises to her, you should see how pleased she is. Don't be a fool, old man. Any other chap would think himself in clover to have a smart, good-looking girl, and a princess too, in love with him to such an extent."

"Well, I shall get thrown, then. That will stop the rides, at any rate."

"Don't, if you take my advice. She will insist on nursing you—rather like it than otherwise. As to your finding it a bore to go out with her——"

"I shouldn't, if I wasn't engaged to her," groaned Caerleon.

"Oh, Lothario!" laughed Cyril, but he forbore to pursue the subject further. He was so highly delighted by the unexpected success of his diplomacy that he could afford to be generous. How the Princess had managed to draw Caerleon into the engagement he could not guess, but he was the last man in the world to quarrel with the accomplished fact. He could stand a good deal from Caerleon in these days, he told himself, taking credit for extraordinary forbearance towards a fellow who was as bad as a bear with a sore head. Why couldn't he put a good face on it, as the Princess did?

She had been obliged to discard her old love, but she didn't let the fact spoil all her enjoyment of life—not she.

As will have been observed, Caerleon's task was not made easier by his *fiancée*. Princess Ottolie saw the full comedy of the situation, where he perceived only its tragic irony, and she took a lively pleasure in emphasising the details of the plot. A born actress, no mere tame acceptance of facts would content her, and she played shamelessly to the gallery. Ordinary love-making was poor,—everything for her must be intense, and surcharged with meaning. She never left Caerleon alone. Loving epithets flowed from her lips in a way that made him feel that he must be blushing scarlet a dozen times a-day. She claimed his time and attention as a right, obliged him to assist her in the most incongruous tasks, made him turn over the pages of her music for her during what seemed interminable hours (she was a most accomplished musician), and appealed in an injured tone to Cyril, or the Queen, or the ladies-in-waiting, if he showed signs of fatigue or preoccupation. The general effect produced was that of a modern and substantial Titania wooing a singularly unresponsive clown, to the great edification of the beholders.

CHAPTER XIII.

PUNIC FAITH.

MATTERS came to a crisis on a certain dreadful evening when the Prince of Dardania, who was staying at one of his palaces a short distance on the other side of the frontier, dined at the castle. An invitation had been sent him, with what the King congratulated himself was a refinement of cruelty, that he might see with his own eyes how complete was the ruin of his hopes, and the scheme met with a success of which its originator had not dreamed. Whether through malice or through nervousness, Princess Ottolie overacted her part enormously that night, insomuch that she awakened doubts even in the mind of Prince Alexis, and thrilled Caerleon with a new horror. Perhaps she had changed her mind, and would after all refuse to release him,—and what would be his position in such a case? It comforted him to see that the Queen managed to exchange a few whispered words with the Prince, as he took his leave after an evening of chilling neglect, but he himself had an account to settle with Princess Ottolie. The next morning the pair had “words” in the conservatory, and Caerleon informed his *fiancée* succinctly that he had no intention of being used as

an instrument of torture with which to harass Prince Alexis.

"If you try it on again, I shall simply make the whole thing known," he said.

"You threaten me?" wept the Princess.

"Not if you behave decently," he answered, with a roughness which only his desperate situation could excuse; "but if a man is supposed to be engaged, he has a right to have a voice in the proceedings of his—of the lady. The fact is, you think you can go as far as you like with me, and I won't have it. You wouldn't dare to carry on in this way with my brother Cyril, or any other man, because you know he might respond, and then you would get into trouble. But as I consider myself virtually engaged to some one else, and was soft-hearted enough to believe what you told me in the forest, you think you can make as big a fool of me as you like; but I'm not going to stand it."

"You are brutal," sobbed Princess Ottolie. "As you say, any other man would feel honoured to be treated in the way I treat you."

"Let him," said Caerleon. "I don't; and I tell you plainly, it's not to go on."

"You are a monster to talk to me like this, at any rate," she said, drying her eyes. "Now that you have delivered your lecture, and I have listened, I will only say one thing; that I would never allow my prince to speak to me as you have done."

She vouchsafed no other expression of penitence, and even this remark Caerleon understood to be intended more as a hit; nor did his lecture seem to have had much effect upon her conduct, for when later in the day Cyril, on finding Princess Ottolie alone, noticed the heaviness of her eyes, and ventured to hope that she

was not suffering from headache, she told him frankly that she had been crying, and gave him to understand that her tears were due to a doubt as to Caerleon's real feelings towards her. A good deal of diplomacy was needed to soothe her apprehensions, and when Cyril left her, with his mind made up to seek Caerleon and warn him to be more careful, he found himself seized upon by the King, who was strongly of the opinion that something was wrong. Why did Caerleon look so gloomy? and why had he made the Princess cry that morning? were his unanswerable questions; and although Cyril, with what he told himself was perfect truth, urged that he could not imagine any reason why his brother, who was notoriously an advocate of love-matches, should engage himself to the Princess against his will, he was obliged to fall back on Caerleon's imaginary unworthiness and low opinion of himself as an explanation. He saw that the King was only half satisfied, and the next day he was forced to feel that this tendency towards mistrust had made itself evident at a very inopportune moment.

Hosts and guests alike at Schloss Herzensruh breakfasted in their own rooms, and it was immediately after the early meal that Cyril received an intimation that the King desired his attendance as soon as possible. The wording of the message struck him as peculiar; but he finished his dressing hurriedly, and presented himself in the study. To his astonishment, he found King Johann surrounded by piles of newspaper packets bearing English stamps, which had just arrived by post. Several of them had been opened, and Cyril was surprised to see that each contained a copy of that well-known weekly, 'Mendacity,' dated two or three days back. Furthermore, on looking at those still

unopened, he recognised in each case the cover of 'Mendacity.'

"Lord Cyril," said the King, and Cyril was surprised to see that the fussy little man could look really kingly, "I have sent for you because all the arrangements for my daughter's engagement have been conducted through you, and also because I was anxious not to trouble your brother if this matter is susceptible of explanation. You see these papers? I think every one of my English friends has sent me a copy, and the same paragraph is marked in each. Perhaps you will kindly read it."

He put one of the papers into Cyril's hand, and he read the marked paragraph:—

"I have no desire to be reckoned among the "unguid," and it has always been my belief that young men will be young men. Still, I am not sorry that my Temperance friends should have the chance of learning the true character of the gay Lothario whom the criminal inertness of a Tory Government has permitted to establish himself on the throne of Thracia. We have heard a good deal lately about the superior morality of this gentleman. His people have all been made suddenly sober—not by Act of Parliament, but by his "royal" decree; he has sacrificed a large part of his income for the purpose of buying up licences, and he is about to put the finishing touch to his catalogue of good deeds by making a love-match with the wealthy and beautiful daughter of a neighbouring sovereign. Perhaps it will be news for some of my readers to learn that this so-called "King" is bound by every tie of honour to marry a Scythian lady of noble family, whose acquaintance he made before

seizing upon the throne, and whom he subsequently abandoned in the most heartless manner, and under circumstances of peculiar cruelty. What does the Nonconformist conscience think of this? Scythia has a long account already outstanding against this choice specimen of the British aristocracy, and when the day of reckoning comes, the swords of her soldiers will not leap from their scabbards with the less alacrity for the remembrance of his behaviour towards their countrywoman."

The time occupied in reading the paragraph through afforded Cyril the opportunity of collecting his thoughts, for he had guessed its drift from the very first sentences. Now he threw down the paper and cried hotly—

"I hope to goodness Caerleon has not seen this! If he has, he will simply go off to Scythia at once, and marry the girl whether she wishes it or not."

"Then the story is true?" shouted the King, half rising from his chair, the veins in his forehead swelling.

"Like most lies, it rejoices in a substratum of truth," answered Cyril, coolly.

"Be good enough to explain to me exactly what you mean," said the King, his fury in a measure disarmed by the young man's serenity.

"The facts are very simple," returned Cyril. "During our tour in Hungary, we made the acquaintance of a Scythian officer and his family. The only daughter was a most estimable young lady, and my brother fell deeply in love with her. We may presume that his affection was not returned—at any rate, when he proposed to her, she refused him. That's all, unless she has changed her mind by this time."

"And you can assure me, on your honour as a nobleman, that there is no other foundation for this—this tale?"

Cyril drew himself up. "I have not the honour to understand your Majesty. Is it possible that you can for a moment have believed the story to be true?"

"There was some justification for such a belief, in this printed paper and in the anxiety of my English friends," said the King, drily.

"If that is the case, I think your Majesty has shown pretty plainly that the prospect of a marriage between my brother and the Princess does not meet with your approval," said Cyril, with awful coldness. "If your Majesty will permit me, I will communicate the fact to him, and we will leave the castle at once."

"No, no! you are too hasty," said King Johann, quickly. "It is surely only natural that I should resent such an aspersion on the character of my future son-in-law. Surely, too, I may complain of a want of openness on your part. Why have I heard nothing of this prior attachment?"

"One is not particularly anxious to publish it abroad that one's brother has made a fool of himself," said Cyril, frankly. "I don't mind acknowledging that I was glad to hush the matter up. But Caerleon insisted on telling the Princess all about it, and I know that he did so before their engagement took place. No doubt that is one reason for his looking so seedy lately. Of course he felt that it wasn't quite fair for a man with an experience of that kind fresh in his memory to seek the love of a whole-hearted, unworldly young girl like her Royal Highness."

This was carrying the war into the enemy's camp

with a vengeance, and the King climbed down from his high horse somewhat hastily.

"I do not complain so much of the concealment of the matter from myself, as of the fact that other persons have been allowed to obtain a knowledge of it," he said, wisely waiving the question of Princess Ottolie's inexperience in affairs of the heart. Cyril made no remark, but accepted the words as confirmation of a suspicion which had occurred to him once or twice, that King Johann's ignorance was merely official, and that he had all along been aware of the existence of Nadia, although he had acquiesced discreetly in the silence hitherto maintained with regard to her. "How do you suppose that the news reached England?" the King went on.

"From a Scythian source, no doubt," answered Cyril, promptly. "Dickinson, the editor of 'Mendacity,' hunts up the scandals of all nations for his wretched rag. I suppose you have no Scythian newspaper of last week?"

"I remember now that one was sent me. It is evident that I have not so many kind friends in Scythia as in England. I put it on one side, for I do not myself read Scythian easily; and I thought —the Queen—about this marriage—things might be said——"

"As matters stand, it is a very good thing you did not," said Cyril, answering the thought rather than the words. "Her Majesty might have misunderstood the whole affair. We all know that ladies are often apt to take strong prejudices, unfortunately."

"Will you read it, and see what it says?" suggested the King.

"I don't know much Scythian, but I might manage

to puzzle it out," said Cyril; and the King brought out a crumpled paper, which the two studied painfully for some minutes.

"Ah, here it is!" cried Cyril, and he began to translate rapidly and freely: "'The Carlino-O'Malachy affair, of which so much has lately been heard in society, appears likely to have far-reaching consequences.' Then there comes pretty much what we have just read in '*Mendacity*.' Then it goes on: 'With a view to obtaining authoritative information on the subject, a representative of this journal called yesterday upon Colonel O'Malachy, who was paying a flying visit to the city, and left this morning. Colonel O'Malachy is a veteran soldier, wearing a medal for distinguished services, and the order of the Byzantine Empire. He has served in ——oh, that doesn't signify. 'The gallant officer maintained an attitude of strict reserve, but admitted that the published accounts of the Thracian usurper's conduct are substantially true. The publicity which had been given to the matter was, however, quite contrary to his wishes and those of his family, for it was not, he said, the custom of a house which numbered kings among its ancestors to submit its wrongs to the arbitrament of a court either of law or of public opinion. Let but an appeal be made to arms, and he would trust to meet the English filibuster face to face on the soil he has seized, and to sheathe the sword, which had drunk Moslem blood in '77, in his treacherous heart.'"

"That conclusion is rather fine," observed Cyril. "I always knew that the O'Malachy was about as picturesque an old villain as remains unhung in these degenerate days; but I did not know he was quite capable of these heroics."

"Perhaps a telegram which I received before you came in may throw some light upon the matter," said the King. "It is from our Minister at Pavelsburg, telling me that this very paper had been warned by the censor, at his request, for publishing unauthorised news. He added that the news related to the King of Thracia."

"Only warned? not suspended?" said Cyril. "That shows they were not sorry to have it believed, then. Well, I fear we can do nothing to bring Scythia to a sense of the error of her ways; but I think I can put a spoke in Dickinson's wheel."

"I am about to indite a formal complaint to the British Government," said the King. "It is intolerable that a newspaper should be allowed to libel the sovereign of a neighbouring country in this way, especially when it is remembered that he is on the point of connecting himself with my family."

"I'm afraid that will scarcely do," said Cyril. "You see, for one thing, Caerleon isn't exactly the sovereign of a neighbouring country—at least, no one seems quite to know whether he is a sovereign at all, or not."

"But that will be satisfactorily settled before long," said the King.

"If Pannonia supports us at Czarigrad in pressing anew for our recognition from Roum it will be, but not otherwise," said Cyril, shortly. "But this uncertainty disposes of any idea of appealing to the British Government. What we have to do is to work upon Dickinson in a way he can understand."

"And what is that?" asked King Johann.

"I know a man on the staff of the 'Universe,'" answered Cyril, "and it will give him and his chief the purest pleasure to make Dickinson take a back seat

over this business. I shall simply send him one little fact, and he will work it up with a few flourishes about Dickinson's abnormal faculty for discovering mares' nests, and a passing remark or two on the subject of his descent from the man who hated Aristides."

"But what is the fact?" asked the King, eagerly.

"Merely this, that the brother of the much-injured lady is still an officer in my brother's guard, and dined at our table, quite in a friendly spirit, the night before we left Bellaviste. If the O'Malachy had any sense of dramatic consistency, he would have ordered him to resign his commission; but as the idea hasn't struck him, we are all right."

"But the mere demonstration that the charge he has brought against your brother is an absurdity will not affect this Dickinson," said the King.

"Oh yes, it will. The very suggestion that he has been taken in by such a ridiculous story will be a sufficient punishment for him."

"But if the aim of his journal is to circulate lies, he cannot have any regard for the truth," objected the King.

"He cares very much about his reputation as a shrewd man of the world," said Cyril. "And you musn't judge his paper from its title. That is Dickinson's little joke. He calls it 'Mendacity' on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, from a theory of his that the name is intended to indicate what the paper is not. The 'Times,' he says, is behind the times; the 'Standard' lags in the rear, instead of leading; and it is just the same with his paper—in each case the contents contradict the name. But some people think that there is more truth in the title than anywhere inside the cover."

"So it would appear," said the King.

"We are rather proud of Dickinson at home," Cyril went on. "He is a purely English product, and *fin de siècle* at that. No other nation can rival his peculiar humour." The King looked as though he, at any rate, found it difficult also to appreciate the bent of Mr Dickinson's genius. "But the 'Universe' will have him on toast this time with a vengeance," continued Cyril, cheerfully. "I suppose we may consider the little affair agreeably settled, sir? Perhaps I may remark that the sooner our application at Czarigrad is granted the easier we shall find it to deal with cases of this kind."

"Naturally," said the King, "before I took any steps whatever to promote a marriage between my daughter and your brother, it was understood that Pannonia would at once do her best to secure the recognition of your rights from Roum."

This was a most satisfactory assurance, and Cyril went away well pleased. The morrow was the day fixed for the betrothal—a ceremony which, according to German ideas, would be wellnigh as indissoluble as marriage itself—and it struck him that the Emperor of Pannonia would probably consider it a pleasing and friendly act to begin to press the claims of Thracia on the Roumi Government immediately, in order to obtain Caerleon's recognition by the suzerain Power as a graceful wedding-gift to the betrothed pair. All seemed to be prospering with Cyril's schemes, and he prepared with a light heart for his departure from Schloss Herzensruh. It was considered more correct that the King of Thracia should arrive on Moesian soil from his own territory on the morning of the betrothal, and the brothers were therefore to return to

their shooting-box for the night. Caerleon's state of mind was a pitiable one. The time fixed for his penance had all but dragged out its weary course, and yet he saw no hope of obtaining his release. What was he to do if no means of escape offered itself during the one day that was left? He was firmly resolved under no circumstances to take upon him the solemn vows of betrothal; but how was he to refuse to do so without either casting a slur on Princess Otilie or betraying her secret? It is absurd, even humiliating, to be obliged to confess it, but the idea of flight presented itself to him more than once in tempting colours.

The first break in the clouds became visible at the mid-day meal, which might be considered either as a late breakfast or as an early lunch, and at which Princess Otilie did not appear. She was not very well, her mother said, and had decided to remain in her room for the day; and she herself sent a special message to Caerleon to the effect that her indisposition was caused by grief regarding the anxiously expected Paris dress, which had indeed arrived, but was horribly cut, and made her look hideous. King Johann received the excuse with considerable seriousness, and remarked that his daughter had an undisciplined mind, and he hoped that Caerleon would teach her to be less frivolous when they were married; but it was evident that he regarded the cause of the illness as amply sufficient under the circumstances, and Caerleon recalled with some amusement the Princess's words in the forest. He could afford to be amused now, for he guessed that Princess Otilie intended on the morrow to urge her indisposition as a reason for postponing the betrothal; and, although the means were not such as he would have chosen, he was so nearly desperate

by this time as to be ready to snatch at any prospect of escape. Hence he also was able to leave the castle cheerfully, and even to endure with patience the chaff in which Cyril indulged as they rode through the forest, although it dealt chiefly with engagement-rings and loss of bachelor freedom, and similar well-worn and appropriate themes.

The afternoon passed quickly, in its unwonted freedom from the Princess's rather exacting society, and with the dusk arrived M. Drakovics, who had journeyed from Bellaviste expressly for the purpose of being present at the betrothal ceremony. Much to Caerleon's relief, he made no pretence of congratulation, and displayed no special interest in the event of the morrow; but immediately after dinner produced a vast pile of reports and returns on the subject of the new liquor laws, and invited the King to go through them with him. Caerleon was only too glad to welcome any work that promised to distract his mind from the gnawing anxiety which assailed him whenever he reflected that it was possible that Princess Ottolie might not be able to carry out her plan after all, and he threw himself into the task with avidity. With Cyril it was otherwise. He was consumed by an intense restlessness, a haunting fear lest some unforeseen catastrophe should interfere with his schemes just as they were on the point of realisation; and he wandered from room to room, pausing now and then to turn over with unquiet fingers the documents which the other two were perusing so strenuously.

"What's up, Cyril? Anything wrong?" asked Caerleon at last.

"Only the fidgets, as old nurse used to say when I was a kid. I'm as much excited as if it was I who

was going to be betrothed to-morrow instead of you. I can't keep quiet. I think I shall go for a walk."

"Now? at this time of night?"

"Rather. I feel as if I had an inexhaustible fund of energy to work off. By the by, have those rubies arrived yet?"

"Yes. Wright went to fetch them from the town this afternoon. He was just in time to meet the Vienna express."

"Did you send him on to Schloss Herzensruh with them?"

"No; of course not. I'm going to take them with me in the morning."

"What an outer barbarian you are!" cried Cyril. "Do you expect Princess Ottolie to put them on in public? She must have them in time to study the effect properly in the glass, and admire herself in them. Give them to me, and I'll take them to her at once."

"You don't mean that you would carry that case of jewels through the forest alone at night?"

"Who is to know that I am carrying it? It will go into my pocket. Besides, there are no robbers here; it's a regular Forest of Arden, a most suitable place for a betrothal. So trot out the box."

"A little later in the year the forest will be dangerous on account of the wolves; but they have not come down from the mountains yet, and Milord Cyril will be in no danger," said M. Drakovics, who found Cyril's restless peregrinations very trying.

"That reminds me," said Caerleon gloomily, as he unlocked one of the table-drawers and took out the jewel-case; "there came a message this morning from one of the mountain villages, saying that several people have been killed by a large solitary wolf, which can

neither be trapped nor shot. They think it's a were-wolf, and they sent to beg me to come up and try to shoot it. It seems that my Express rifle has made a name for itself, and there's some superstition about the King's bullet, besides. It's a horrid bother that I can't go. I suppose I shall have to let Prince Alexis know. One can't leave the people to be decimated on the chance of my having a day off some time next week. There you are, Cyril, if you are bent on going. Don't lose those rubies, or I'll tell the man to send in the bill to you."

Cyril was already in the hall donning his fur-lined coat and cap; and putting the case in his pocket, he started on his lonely walk. Autumn was passing into winter, but there was no snow on the ground as yet, and the dry leaves crackled pleasantly under his feet as he struck into the moonlit path between the tall black tree-stems. For a short time he walked fast and steadily, in order to exorcise the feeling of excitement which possessed him; then he slackened his pace a little, and as the stillness of the forest made itself felt, began to whistle. He was tramping vigorously along, with his hands thrust deep in his pockets, when it seemed to him that he saw the figure of a man on the path some distance in front of him. The shadows cast by the moonlight from the tree-trunks were so perplexing that he could not be sure that his eyes had not deceived him; but his blood kindled with an excitement which was by no means disagreeable, as he assured himself that his revolver was in its usual pocket. If there was a man in front of him he had passed completely out of sight, and Cyril scanned narrowly the straight stems on either side of the path as he walked on, assuring himself that he was looking for some dis-

torted tree which must have taken the shape of a human figure in the moonlight. No such trunk appeared, however; but at the next turn of the path he caught sight of a tall man leaning against a tree. His hand went to his revolver instantly; but he recognised the Prince of Dardania, and stepped back with a laugh.

"What! you here?" both exclaimed simultaneously. Cyril recovered himself first. "I didn't know you were in the habit of taking midnight rambles on Thracian territory," he said. "Are you meditating a woful sonnet?" He stopped hurriedly, remembering that the quotation was rather an unhappy one under the circumstances, and reflecting that there could be little doubt that Prince Alexis had been taking a last look at the abode of the lady of his love before she was lost to him for ever.

"Not exactly," returned the Prince, with some hesitation. "In fact, I was wondering whether I might ask you to do me a good turn. But perhaps your own business is urgent?"

"Oh, I am not love, only love's messenger," said Cyril, carelessly. "I am taking a small parcel to Schloss Herzensruh from my brother."

"Then, if you will, you can give me the very help I need," said the Prince, turning and walking by Cyril's side. "You see me, as you say in England, in a hole. The fact is, my dear Mortimer, I am in love."

Cyril's first remark was fortunately only uttered mentally, for it was not of a sympathetic character. "I hardly see how I am to help you," he added aloud.

"No?" said the Prince; "but I do. Perhaps you may be surprised to hear that I love a lady of the Queen of Moesia's household?"

"A lady of the household!" cried Cyril. "But I thought——"

"That I was in love with the Princess? But, my dear friend, a screen is sometimes necessary. At any rate, both the Queen and the Princess know the truth now."

"Then I suppose that's the secret of the snubbing you got the other night? It certainly was tremendous. I was really sorry for you."

"Well," pursued the Prince, "the Queen has treated me better than I could have dared to hope. She is so good as to give her sanction to my plans for a private marriage to-night."

"But why private?" asked Cyril.

"My friend, I have Ministers, who interest themselves unduly in my affairs at times. I wish to present my marriage to them as an accomplished fact."

"I see; and no doubt the Queen thinks that a public wedding might encourage the rest of her ladies to go and do likewise, a consummation which would scarcely meet her views. Well, if the ruling power is so propitious, why don't you go in and win?"

"That is all that I desire. I have everything prepared at my summer-palace five miles away, the chapel ready, witnesses, Greek and Lutheran clergy to perform the ceremony. But how shall I reach my bride? King Johann has peopled the forest in the neighbourhood of the castle with gamekeepers and frontier-guards, and if I am seen, all is lost. The news would be carried to him immediately, and he bears such a grudge against me that he would spare no pains to discover my object and to thwart it."

"But still, I don't see what you want me to do," said Cyril.

"Merely this, to bring my bride from the castle, and escort her to me here. I have two good horses waiting, one with a lady's saddle, and it will not take you long."

"But do you think I am going to compromise myself in this way out of pure philanthropy?" said Cyril. "I insist on being asked to the wedding."

"Then I fear that you will be obliged to escort the bride all the way to my house, while I start off on foot," said the Prince, "for I have not brought another horse."

"The honour is only too great," returned Cyril. "I am determined that nothing shall do me out of my share of the fun. Why, I daresay you have never even thought of getting hold of any one to propose the health of the bridal pair, and I've been told I'm rather good at that sort of thing."

"No; I have not, indeed," said the Prince. "You are in earnest? Then I will give you your directions, and part from you here. When you have delivered your message, and left the castle, knock three times at the postern-door close to the angle of the wall on this side. If the mistress of the household opens it, say that you are come on my behalf to fetch Fräulein von Staubach."

"What? the lectrice?" asked Cyril.

"Yes; Fräulein von Staubach is the Queen's lectrice and secretary. You know her?" the Prince asked, rather anxiously.

"I have caught a glimpse of her once or twice—just enough to see that she was a fair-haired girl in spectacles. She doesn't show up as much as some of the other ladies."

"No; she is generally busy writing the Queen's letters. But you will know her when you see her?"

The Princess might play you a trick. She has a mole on the back of her left wrist."

"Oh, I shall know her all right. Then, when I have got her safe, we have only to mount and ride away, I suppose?"

"Yes; the horses are here, you see, tied to this tree."

"But suppose we meet any of the gamekeepers? They will think it queer, to say the least, to see me riding about late at night with one of the Queen's ladies."

"Unless you say that Fräulein von Staubach has been summoned back to Germany by a sudden message, and that you are escorting her to the station, I don't see what you can do; and that would leave a good deal unexplained," said the Prince, laughing. "They are scarcely likely to stop you, and no blame can attach to you afterwards, when everything comes out. You are merely doing a friend a good turn."

"All right, then," said Cyril. "We shall meet again," and he waved his hand as Prince Alexis started on his lengthy walk, while he went on to the castle.

CHAPTER XIV.

OVER THE BORDER AND AWAY.

CYRIL's appearance at so late an hour caused some surprise at Schloss Herzensruh, but his ostensible errand did not take long to perform. After receiving a promise from the high functionary to whom he delivered the jewels that they should be placed in the Princess's hands immediately, and declining alike the King's invitation to come in and rest and his offer of an escort through the forest, he was very soon outside the grounds again. When he had gone far enough to be out of sight of any one who might be looking after him from the porter's lodge, he turned aside from the path, and made his way to the little door in the wall which Prince Alexis had described to him. It opened immediately at his third knock, and in the shadow behind it he saw two ladies standing, the taller of whom was unmistakably the Queen.

"I was not expecting you, Lord Cyril," she said, but without any show of surprise.

"The Prince of Dardania has intrusted me with the honour of escorting Fräulein von Staubach over the frontier into his territory, your Majesty," said Cyril, while the other lady giggled hysterically.

"My Sophie, control yourself," said the Queen, with an authoritative touch on her shoulder. "You have met Lord Cyril Mortimer before, I think? I will not keep you here, in case my absence should be remarked. Lord Cyril, I may trust you?"

"I will do my best to justify the confidence which your Majesty and the Prince are reposing in me," said Cyril. "But if you will pardon my hurrying you, I think that Fräulein von Staubach and I ought to start at once. We have a fairly long ride before us."

"Farewell, my child!" said the Queen, pressing what struck Cyril as a very affectionate kiss on the girl's forehead. "I shall expect to hear from you to-morrow."

Fräulein von Staubach's reply was inaudible; but she threw her arms round the Queen's neck and kissed her vehemently, then, without looking back, she took Cyril's offered arm and walked quickly away with him, the Queen locking the door after them. As they picked their way among the tree-trunks—for Cyril thought it better not to keep to the path—he stole a look once and again at his companion when they came to a patch of moonlight. She was of middle height, and apparently rather stout, although this might be the fault of her wraps, and her fair hair was elaborately frizzed in front, and gathered into the fashionable lump behind. Her eyes were concealed by her spectacles; but Cyril could just distinguish that her eyebrows were so fair as to be almost colourless under the long gauze veil which covered her face, and was tied in a bow under her chin. So far as he could tell, she was wearing a white evening dress, with the train carefully looped up, and a heavy fur cloak over it. A less suitable costume for a midnight ride in winter could scarcely be imagined,

and he remarked that it might have been wise to come in a riding-habit.

"Oh, but I could not be married in a habit. What a hideous idea!" she exclaimed, in a high-pitched voice with a marked Low German accent, such as after that night Cyril could never hear without a shudder.

"I fear you will find it difficult to ride in that dress," he persisted.

"It will be difficult for me to ride at all," she said, with a giggle; and Cyril restrained with difficulty an exclamation of disgust. It began to be clear to him now why the Prince had so readily resigned to him the honour of escorting his bride from her old to her new home. They had reached the horses by this time, and Cyril prepared to assist his charge to mount.

"Put your left hand on my shoulder, and hold the pommel with your right," he said; "and give me your left foot. Now, spring!"

He gave a mighty heave, and the lady sprang; but with such ill success that she came down again in the same place. A second and a third attempt failed in like manner, and Cyril lost patience.

"If I can't mount you this time, Fräulein, I shall be obliged to take you back to the castle. It won't do to keep you poised in mid-air all night."

On this occasion, however, they were successful, thanks to a frantic effort on the part of Fräulein von Staubach, and Cyril mounted his own horse (the animals were fortunately quiet ones) and guided both into the path.

"Try to sit a little straighter in your saddle," he said to his companion. "If the beast begins to trot, you will go off."

"Oh no!" she giggled shrilly. "I shall hold round his neck."

Cyril was silent in deep disgust, and resolved mentally that he would not speak to her again; but when a disposition on the part of the horses to break into a trot had been checked two or three times by little screams from her, he remarked drily—

"We shall never reach the palace to-night at this rate."

"Never mind me, then, *Mein Herr*, I will hold to the pommel," she responded valiantly, and Cyril set his teeth hard and urged the horses on. In some wonderful way his companion managed to keep her seat, and, with the help of a few directions from him, got on better than he had expected, although he still muttered wrathfully to himself that he was thankful there was no one about to see him giving riding-lessons to a *sack!* Slowly the long miles were covered, and midnight had passed when the riders entered the courtyard of the Prince of Dardania's palace, which Cyril had already visited with Caerleon. Here all was bustle, servants bearing torches were ranged on either side of the door, and Prince Alexis himself hastened anxiously forward to receive his bride, who slipped from her horse into his arms with a hysterical laugh.

"It has been almost too much!" Cyril heard her say, as the Prince led her up the steps, and it struck him that she had visibly increased in height since his first glimpse of her in the castle garden.

"I've heard of people who got two inches taller owing to the consciousness of success, but I never saw it happen before," he said to himself, as he gave the horses into the charge of a servant, and allowed himself to be conducted into the palace by a bowing official.

The door opened into a great hall, through which Prince Alexis had just led his bride into a side room, where Cyril had a momentary view of a number of Dardanian ladies, evidently of high rank, gathering around their future Princess ; but his guide conducted him through a long passage into a chapel, where everything was in readiness for the celebration of the Greek marriage-rite. The space on one side of the aisle was filled with Dardanian chiefs and nobles, splendid-looking men in gorgeous national costumes ; and as Cyril was ushered to his place among them, he wondered how long it would be before a similar throng was gathered together for Caerleon's wedding, and how many different religious ceremonies it would take to marry him. He had abundant opportunity for meditation, for the Lutheran rite was proceeding in another room ; but after a while the vacant seats on the other side of the chapel were filled by the ladies of whom he had caught a glimpse, and the bride and bridegroom entered, and advanced up the aisle. The lady's face was hidden by an elaborate lace veil, and Cyril felt a momentary curiosity as to the means by which she had managed to bring it with her ; but his attention was soon distracted to more important details. The half-married bride was undoubtedly taller than she had appeared in the garden, and carried herself regally ; and as Cyril gazed at her by the flickering light of the lamps burning before the sacred pictures and on the dais, it struck him that she was otherwise altered. Fräulein von Staubach was fair, but he was almost certain that this girl's knot of hair was dark ; and when she turned her head for a moment, it seemed to him that her eyebrows also were dark and strongly marked.

What had happened ? What was the meaning of

this enigma? Had he been fooled? He listened eagerly to the words of the priest, trying to discover some clue to the mystery; but he was unacquainted with the service and with the language in which it was conducted, and he had no prayer-book. He gathered that some question was being asked of the bridegroom; but strain his ears as he would, he could not distinguish in it the name of Sophie von Staubach, while for one awful instant he was haunted by the dread that he had heard the words Ottolie Ivanovna. A moment or two more, and his fear was confirmed, for the question addressed to the bride was answered, not in the shrill Low German accents of Fräulein von Staubach, but in the clear decided tones of Princess Ottolie. Cyril was standing quietly by, while his brother's bride was married to another man before his eyes! He sprang forward, but a hand laid upon his shoulder on either side held him back. He was gripped by the two stalwart Dardanians between whom he was standing.

"Monsieur must not disturb the ceremony," said one of them in bad French; and Cyril, seeing that he was overmatched, resisted the temptation to disturb the ceremony to some purpose by a shout proclaiming the falseness of the bride, and remained mute and motionless throughout the protracted rite, with its prayers and incense, its presentation of the Common Cup, and its crowning and marching round the dais, although during the whole time the thought was forcing itself into his mind that Caerleon must have known of all this. The fact that he had been looking forward to such a *dénouement* explained both his willingness to enter into the engagement at all, and his callousness with regard to his *fiancée*, while his anxiety and misery

throughout the past week were accounted for by the uncertainty of his position. And Princess Ottolie ! Cyril ground his teeth as he remembered her tormenting doubts as to Caerleon's affection, and how he had comforted her, while all the time she had been carrying on this complicated train of deception. But, after all, her moral turpitude was nothing to that of Caerleon. Cyril, the shrewd, the far-sighted, the diplomatist, had been duped, and by the brother whom he had always regarded as an honest simpleton, whose every thought he believed that he knew. It may seem a paradox to say that when Cyril's first rage had cooled, the effect of his discovery was to heighten very considerably his respect for Caerleon, but so it was. The man by whom he had been deceived in this way must be possessed of a certain amount of brains.

Cyril had arrived at this point in his meditations when the ceremony concluded, and the bridal company left the chapel to sign the register. He was among the foremost who followed them into the room in which the book was placed in readiness, and when she had written her name, Princess Ottolie offered the pen to him with a mischievous smile—

“Come, Lord Cyril; you will add your name as a witness ?”

“I am much honoured, but your Royal Highness will not catch me twice,” he replied ; and she turned away with a laugh. He felt tempted to make his escape at once ; but pride forbade him to slink away and show himself defeated, and he determined to face her again, and tell her one or two home-truths. His opportunity came later, when the bridal pair had proceeded to the throne-room to receive the congratulations of those present, and his name was duly announced by the grand chamberlain.

“Now, Lord Cyril,” said the Princess, when he had

uttered the requisite formula with just the shade of exaggeration which showed that his good wishes were not wholly sincere, "confess that you were completely deceived. Of course it would have been much more sensible to wear a riding-habit; but I knew that the real Sophie von Staubach would never consent to be married in one, and I felt that I must dress the character consistently."

"The illusion was perfect," returned Cyril. "I can only congratulate your Royal Highness on the skill with which you have rendered the first act of your—tragedy."

"Tragedy?" asked Prince Alexis, sharply. "Why tragedy?"

"If I wished to be unpleasant," said Cyril, "I might quote Shakespeare, and say, 'She has deceived her father, and may thee.' But that would be impolite, and besides, the tragedy to which I refer is not a domestic but a public one. It doesn't require much foresight to prophesy that the results of this night's work will be

‘Sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
The craft of kindred and the ruthless hosts
Of Scythia swarming o'er the Euxine sea.’

But you really must excuse me," he broke off apologetically; "I seem to be dealing in English literature specimens, adapted to suit present circumstances, to-night. The fact is, that my mind is still so completely under the spell of the superb acting of her Royal Highness, that poetry comes to my tongue more readily than prose."

The Prince frowned. "I fail to see why a European war should be the consequence of our marriage, as you seem to imply."

"Simply because Thracia has been induced to part with territory under a misapprehension."

"Ah, my price!" cried Princess Ottolie. "You see I am acquainted with your little plans, Lord Cyril, and I have out-plotted you. You are angry to-night, but to-morrow you will see that you have deserved it. You have done all you could to make me believe that your brother was deeply in love with me, when the whole time I knew from his own lips that it was all he could do to endure the sight of me. It was I who arranged with the Prince that you were to be brought here to-night. I was determined to have my revenge on you, to show you that there were others who could lay plots as well as yourself. Don't talk about misapprehensions. Your brother the King will be the first to tell you that he has aided me throughout in this conspiracy of mine until to-day."

"That my brother was foolish enough to allow himself to be persuaded to join you in playing a practical joke, in very doubtful taste, on your father, will make no difference to the Thracians," retorted Cyril. "They will demand back the territory out of which they have been cozened, and the great Powers will be drawn into the war."

"I hope the consequences will not be so serious as you seem to expect," said Prince Alexis, breaking into the war of words. "I enjoy some little influence at the Scythian Court, and I can promise you that it shall be exerted on behalf of the independence of Thracia, and in favour of your brother, to whom I shall always be grateful for the part he has played during the last few days. And now, Lord Cyril, we must not detain you longer, or King Carlino will be anxious about you. Stefan here will take you to a

room where there is refreshment prepared, and after that you will find a fresh horse and an escort of six of my guard to conduct you back to Thracia. I owe you many thanks for the assistance you have given me to-night."

"And remember," added Princess Ottolie, as Cyril bowed, "that though I can't quite forgive King Carlino for the way in which he has treated me, I am sorry I teased him so much. But I am not sorry that I hoaxed you to-night."

Thus dismissed, Cyril had no option but to take his leave of the royal couple, and commit himself to the charge of Stefan, who brought him to a buffet, where he made a hasty meal. He was conscious that it would have been more in keeping with his tragic utterances to quit the palace at once, refusing either to eat or drink within its walls, and denouncing vengeance against its perfidious mistress; but the night was very cold, he was tired, and there was a long ride before him. And after all, it could not be denied that the Princess had played her part wonderfully well; there was no disgrace in having been deceived by her. But it was inexcusable to have been taken in by Caerleon, clumsy and unwilling actor as he was; and the only point Cyril could allege in his own favour was that he might be pardoned for not suspecting such an unprecedented event as his brother's lending himself to support a course of deception. The thought comforted him to some extent, however, and as he mounted the horse prepared for him he felt more at peace with himself. The ride home occupied a much shorter space of time than the former one had done, and Cyril laughed angrily to himself as he remembered the amount of trouble he had wasted in giving a riding-

lesson to the best rider in Moesia. The thought recalled to him his grudge against Caerleon, and when he had dismissed his Dardanian escort a little way from the hunting-lodge, he made up his mind to punish his brother by giving him one more night's suspense. He was bound to hear in the morning of what had happened; but it would only be a richly deserved punishment for him not to be relieved from his anxiety sooner. Accordingly, Cyril went straight to bed as soon as he entered the house, although he heard the voices of Caerleon and M. Drakovics still engaged in earnest discourse in the dining-room.

Half an hour later footsteps paused outside his door, and Caerleon's voice said, "Asleep, old man?" to which he replied only by a sleepy grunt.

"I'm glad I didn't let the fellow come in and bemoan himself to me," he reflected, as the footsteps passed on. "I should have had to tell him the whole thing in self-defence."

Cyril slept late the next morning, and when he awoke he heard Caerleon tramping moodily up and down outside his window, speaking a cheerless word now and again to the dogs. He rose and dressed slowly, turning over in his mind the various methods which occurred to him of utilising this defeat of his as a stepping-stone to further victories. Presently the sound of another voice in the garden arrested his attention, and looking out, he saw one of the King of Moesia's gorgeously attired jägers giving Caerleon a parcel, which he said he had been commanded by the Queen to place in his own hands. As soon as the man was gone, Caerleon, in some surprise, opened the packet, and Cyril saw that it contained

the case of rubies which he himself had carried to Schloss Herzensruh the night before. Lying above the jewels was a paper, which Caerleon unfolded, and read the contents.

"Oh, joy ! she's off !" he cried, infinite relief in his tones. "I'm rid of her at last."

"Chuck it in," said Cyril, and his brother handed it to him, turning to rearrange the glowing gems on their velvet bed, with fingers that were not quite steady. The paper was in the Princess's writing :—

"At last I am able to release your Majesty from a position which I grieve to see you have found intolerably irksome. They say that we women are willing to sell our very souls for jewels ; but you will believe me when I tell you that I had far rather see your rubies in the possession of the person to whom they rightly belong, and to whom you would prefer to give them. When this time of storm and stress is over, and you meet Mdlle. Nadia again, present them to her with my love. Tell her this also in all friendliness, that if she desires a testimony to your character, she need only refer to me. You were right in saying, when you scolded me so rudely two days ago, that I should never have dared to go so far with any one else ; but I felt that I could trust you, and my trust was justified by the event. At any rate, I will bear witness that you were softened by none of my overtures, that you kept me at a distance—not gently, no, I cannot say gently—but firmly, certainly, always firmly. Forgive me ; this is the last time I shall tease you. My husband and I pray for your happiness and that of your bride.—From your friend,

" OTTILIE, Princess of Dardania.

"I entreat you to give my remembrances to your brother, who will tell you any particulars about my wedding that you may care to hear."

"Then you are glad to be out of it?" said Cyril.

"Glad? Rather! If I wasn't a middle-aged monarch, I should throw up my cap and jump for joy. Give me the letter and I'll tear it up. I shouldn't like Nadia ever to come upon the detestable thing. Fancy a woman's writing like that!"

"Then you intend to try your luck again with Miss O'Malachy?"

"How can I, so long as I am king? But to have got rid of this wretched entanglement seems to bring me nearer to her at once."

"What a selfish beast you are!" was Cyril's remark. "Thinking only of yourself, and nothing about Thracia, and what the breaking off of this affair will involve."

"I'm very sorry if it leads to trouble," said Caerleon, trying to look suitably serious, "and I'll do all I can to set it right, short of running into another engagement; but you can't expect me to be sorry that this one is over."

"The wedding will lead to war, undoubtedly."

"Why should it? If I don't feel myself insulted by the Princess's way of leading up to it, I don't see why any one else should."

"Thracia won't see things in the same light, though. The whole nation has been insulted in your person, and, furthermore, cheated into giving up territory without a return. Nothing but blood will wash out the remembrance."

"But I will explain the whole thing to everybody."

"Do. Who do you think will believe you? No one will imagine that a sane man could make such an utter and irretrievable idiot of himself. It will simply be thought that you are trying to shield the girl. No; all you can do is to keep your mouth shut. Look here," Cyril was struck by a sudden inspiration, "Will you leave Drakovics and me to put things straight?"

"If you think you can do it better without me," replied Caerleon pacifically, overlooking his brother's uncomplimentary language in consideration of the provocation he had received. "But mind, on your honour, there must be no more meddling with marriages and engagements. If I hear so much as a whisper of such a thing, I will repudiate all your negotiations, and take the management of affairs into my own hands."

"No fear. After this job has turned out so badly, I shall not take up the matrimonial agency business again in a hurry. I only want to have you out of the way, because I am afraid that King Johann will get round you. Go and kill your were-wolf, can't you? and be a benefit to society."

"I'd go like a shot, all the more that I shan't have to bring *her* the skin; but don't you think it would look rather bad—rather unfeeling, you know?"

"I think you are the most exasperating idiot I ever had to do with," returned Cyril, hopelessly. "Don't you see that it will look worse for you to be hanging about here with that face on? Go and be alone with nature and your grief—or, in plain English, go and grin where no one can see you."

"All right," said Caerleon, with a laugh. "May I have breakfast first?"

"Yes, so long as you are well out of the way be-

fore they can send here from the castle. Give your orders now, so that you can start as soon as you have finished."

"By the by," said Caerleon, "what did the Princess mean by saying that you could give me particulars of the wedding?"

"Well, if you particularly want to know, I was present at the ceremony—not intentionally, as you can guess."

"Last night? Queer that you should just have happened to drop in upon them."

This was all that passed between them on the subject, for Cyril was resolved never to reveal the crowning deception of which he had been the victim. He could only hope that Princess Ottilie would be equally reticent.

The brothers breakfasted alone; and after the meal Cyril hurried Caerleon off to the mountains, in dire fear lest an emissary from Schloss Herzensruh should appear before he had arranged his plan of action with M. Drakovics. As soon as his brother had left the house he obtained admission to the Premier's room, where M. Drakovics was devouring a blue-book full of statistics simultaneously with his breakfast. He looked up in some surprise as Cyril entered.

"You are early, milord."

"Are you prepared to meet a great emergency, monsieur?"

M. Drakovics collected his thoughts, and was prepared immediately.

"You need not tell me what the emergency is, milord. The King refuses to fulfil his engagement."

"Not at all. The Princess has bolted."

"Bolted?" inquired M. Drakovics, mildly.

"Yes, bolted—cut and run, eloped, with the Prince of Dardania."

"But is it too late to stop them?"

"Quite. They were married last night."

"But this is appalling, milord!"

"It is bad enough; but there is worse behind. My brother was in the plot."

"Impossible, milord! You cannot tell me that his Majesty would enter into an agreement to make himself the laughing-stock of the world?"

"It is unfortunately too true that my brother only engaged himself to the Princess that he might help her to carry out this design of hers. Of course the Queen was in it as well. Between them they have made a good deal of use of him. I am as much astonished as you can possibly be that he should have listened to them for an instant."

"Ah! that admission scarcely accords with the claim which you advanced some time ago to a complete knowledge of his Majesty's character," said M. Drakovics, looking up with a smile which was more like a snarl.

"You have a right to make any remarks you please on the subject," said Cyril, quietly. "They cannot be more bitter than those I have been making to myself. In fact, I have no doubt that we could pass an hour or two very pleasantly in exchanging a series of mutual recriminations. But if you are the man I think you, you will not waste time in squabbling, but will join with me in using the few minutes we have before us in taking measures which may yet turn this crushing defeat into a triumph."

"Milord, you are superb!" said M. Drakovics, looking at him with heartfelt if somewhat reluctant admiration. "You have the true diplomatic spirit. I accept your

rebuke willingly, and rejoice that I have such a colleague at my side in this crisis. What are the measures you would propose ? ”

“ There is one fatal flaw in our case,” said Cyril,— “ Caerleon’s connivance in the Princess’s plot. If that once comes out, nothing can save us. But the happy couple are both animated by sentiments of such deep gratitude towards him, that I don’t think they are likely to split. If the Queen was on the opposite side, she would be dangerous ; but King Johann is not likely to ask her advice, and she will not feel inclined to interfere uninvited. Therefore I think we may count upon the facts not transpiring, unless Caerleon publishes it in one of these unaccountable chivalrous fits of his. He is out of the way for to-day, and we ought to be able to get things settled by the time he comes back in such a way that it will not dawn upon him how we managed it. Bounce is our only chance. Our business just now is to keep Caerleon on the throne, not to give Europe lessons in morality gratis at his expense. How soon can the First Army Corps be ready to mobilise ? ”

“ In twenty-four hours. We tried the experiment only a fortnight ago.”

“ Good. Then telegraph to Sertchaeff to mass it on the Moesian frontier as soon as it can be got there. You see our game ? ”

“ I do, milord. It is a bold, but not an impossible one to play. But why not occupy the ceded territory at once ? ”

“ Because we don’t wish to start the war if we can help it. We must carry this business through without giving the Powers cause to interfere, if possible. Pannonia will do our work if we make proper use of the

Schwarzwald-Molzau family influence; but for us to cross the Moesian frontier would be to defy her to do her worst. Still, you might also telegraph to the commandant at Feodoratz, ordering him to be ready to move out with his troops at a moment's notice. They are only ten miles away from the disputed strip, and could take possession and hold it easily until they were relieved the day after to-morrow by the First Army Corps. There is a horn! You had better be in the drawing-room with me to receive the messenger."

"One moment, milord. Where is the King?"

"I have sent him out shooting. He is better out of the way this morning."

"But if the King of Moesia were to send after him and capture him, we should be lost."

"King Johann Casimir will not know where he is, if I can help it," said Cyril, "and the idea would scarcely occur to his mind, in any case. If he were on good terms with the Queen, it is the kind of bold measure that would suggest itself to her; but he isn't, and therefore he won't have the benefit of her advice."

They went into the drawing-room, the only part of the little house that boasted of foreign furniture and decorations, and presently a very high official of the Moesian Court was ushered in. M. Drakovics and Cyril received him with grave faces and in dead silence.

"My orders are to open my business to no one but the King himself," said the messenger.

"His Majesty cannot grant an audience to any one this morning," returned Cyril, coldly. "About an hour ago he received a letter from her Royal Highness, the perusal of which has deeply affected him. I will take charge of any message of which you may be the bearer."

But this was not within the scope of the ambassador's

instructions, and after a little more parleying, he took his departure, after which M. Drakovics seized the opportunity of sending off his telegrams. It was some time before another horn was heard; but now it was King Johann Casimir himself who rode up to the shooting-box, and asked to see King Carlino, only to receive the same answer as his representative.

"It is absolutely impossible for me even to inform my brother of your Majesty's arrival," said Cyril; "but if you can suggest any means by which the gravity of the present crisis may be lessened, M. Drakovics and I are empowered to consider the proposal, and to take any preliminary measures that may be necessary."

The King sat down, and Cyril saw that the battle was half won, although his first words were full of dignity.

"I do not understand you, Lord Cyril. This is a most unfortunate and disagreeable affair; but it does not seem to me to bring about a crisis."

"No?" said Cyril. "Will your Majesty consider for a moment how the facts will strike the ears of Europe? A trustful young King, whose advisers are above all things anxious to live in peace with their nearest neighbours, is inveigled (I beg your Majesty's pardon, but that is the word that will be used) into ceding a portion of territory in return for the promise of the hand of a certain lady. The unimportant detail that the lady is determined to marry another person is not communicated to him, although he himself insists, so delicate is his sense of honour, on acquainting her with the facts of a past and gone love-affair of his own before he will ask her to engage herself to him. Then, when the territory has been ceded, she suddenly elopes with the other man, and he is left in the lurch. I ask you whether

the position is likely to be accepted meekly, either by a man of my brother's character or by a high-spirited nation like Thracia ? ”

“ But you cannot imagine that I had anything to do with my daughter's marriage ? ” cried the King.

“ I bring no accusations, your Majesty. I have merely stated the case as it will appear to Thracia and to Europe, although I grant there is at present no proof that you were acquainted with the Princess's intention of eloping last night. Thracia gave up a portion of territory in order to gain a certain alliance, which is now refused her. It is impossible that you can have been ignorant of the mutual affection that existed between her Royal Highness and the Prince of Dardania ; but you gave no hint of it either to my brother or to me, and this serves to complicate the situation. M. Drakovics will tell your Majesty what steps we have felt it necessary to take in order to vindicate the dignity of the country.”

King Johann Casimir turned helplessly to the Premier.

“ I fear that when the news once becomes known in Thracia, the popular indignation there will be overwhelming,” said the latter, “ and I have therefore been the more anxious to conduct everything in the most regular way possible. Unless your Majesty can suggest any means of relieving the tension of the situation, I may remark that we shall be forced to declare war this evening, and to proceed to occupy the disputed territory immediately.”

“ But there will be a revolution in Moesia if that strip of land is lost through the action of any member of my family,” cried the King.

A look of satisfaction flashed from M. Drakovics to

Cyril over King Johann's head. "The possibility of such an occurrence can hardly be expected to influence the action of Thracia, although it is doubtless fraught with much interest to your Majesty's advisers," said the Premier.

"Nothing could be further from our thoughts than to regard such a disastrous event with indifference," cried Cyril, warmly. "My brother would be horrified by the very idea. Is there nothing that your Majesty can suggest that would avert such a calamity, while at the same time salving the wounded honour of Thracia?"

"We have no power of raising an indemnity," said the King.

"The very suggestion is an insult, your Majesty!" cried M. Drakovics. "We Thracians are striving for our national life, not for money. What we desire is a place among the nations. Any assistance towards the attainment of our ideal—" he broke off, watching the King narrowly.

"In what direction?"

"Our chief reason for congratulating ourselves on the alliance proposed between King Carlino and your Majesty's family was the conviction that Thracia would thereby range herself on the side of Pannonia and European peace. That hope is now lost, for what claim have we upon the friendship of Pannonia? But if there were any means by which she might be induced to support us still in obtaining our recognition from the Grand Signior of Roum—"

"I see. You desire our understanding to remain in force, with the one unfortunate exception?" said the King, obviously much relieved.

"Exactly. We desire that our alliance with your Majesty's kingdom may continue," said M. Drakovics.

"This object may appear a small advantage in return for which to waive our claim to the ceded territory; but it is of such importance to us that if it is assured, I can answer for the tranquillity of Thracia."

"My brother is also extremely anxious not to press hardly upon your Majesty," said Cyril. "It would not be like him not to feel keenly such a slight as he has received; but out of consideration for you, and for the sake of his kingdom, he will lay aside his own feeling in the matter. Your Majesty will wish, no doubt, to consult your Ministers—who were to arrive at the castle last night, I remember, in order to be present at the ceremony so unhappily interrupted—before signifying your adherence to the plan we suggest; and you will probably also consider it advisable to communicate with the Emperor of Pannonia. M. Drakovics will undertake that no active steps shall be taken until this evening in the matter of the frontier; and I do not doubt that your Majesty will think, on considering the circumstances, that to give us the assurance we ask is merely a piece of international courtesy."

"It's done!" said Cyril, meeting Caerleon that night on his return in triumph with the were-wolf's skin, "though I thought my hair would have turned grey with anxiety while we waited. The treaty with Moesia is to stand, and Pannonia will continue to support us at Czarigrad. These seem only little things; but they mean a good deal to us, and they stave off the Great War for a little while longer. Everything is quiet now."

"Wait a minute," said Caerleon. "There's something I want to say. It seems to me that neither of you," glancing from Cyril to M. Drakovics, "has quite

understood hitherto my intentions about marrying. That there may be no doubt about them in the future, I intend to declare you my heir, Cyril, when we return to Bellaviste, and this must be confirmed by the Legislative Assembly if I am to stay in Thracia. Miss O'Malachy won't marry me, and I won't marry any one else; but this plan will secure the succession to the throne."

"I don't quite appreciate being set up side by side with you for Scythia to plot against," said Cyril; "but never mind, I daresay I shall get used to it in time."

"And I cannot doubt that your Majesty's choice will be most popular in Thracia," said M. Drakovics.

"Ah, very good,—and when I have time, Cyril, I will set about looking for a wife for you," said Caerleon, lazily.

CHAPTER XV.

TERMS OF ACCOMMODATION.

THE two months which had been fraught with events of so much moment to Caerleon had not been devoid of incident for Nadia, although her circumstances afforded at first sight far less promise of excitement than did his. Since their hasty departure from Bellaviste, the O'Malachy and his wife had been sojourning at the frontier village of Witska, where they seemed inclined to remain as a thorn in the side of M. Drakovics, and this the more that he could not discover any motive, even that of devising plots, for their doing so. His agents visited the village perpetually, both in disguise and in their proper persons, and after dogging the footsteps of the Herr Oberst and his wife for a longer or shorter time, and even making incursions into their rooms at the inn when they were out, returned to their employer baffled. In fact, there seemed nothing for them to observe. The "Kur" arrangements at Witska were more primitive even than those at Janoszwar; but the O'Malachy drank the regulation number of tumblers of medicated water with unfaltering bravery, and took the prescribed stroll afterwards, accompanied by his wife, on the only level piece of road in the

village, duly increasing the distance a little every day. The afternoon was invariably spent in the open air, in a sheltered spot at the foot of a blank wall belonging to the oldest part of the inn, Madame O'Malachy reading aloud occasional extracts from one of the French novels which were her constant companions, and her husband responding lazily with good-humoured criticisms. No life could have appeared more simple and innocent, none more entirely above-board. And yet, as Nadia could have told, although she based her opinion rather upon various small indications than upon actual evidence, the worthy couple were the whole time carrying on an extensive and complicated secret correspondence, and acting as intermediaries between the Thracian patriots who disliked the present *régime* and their Scythian sympathisers. An unexpected meeting with her mother early one morning showed Nadia that she was pale and heavy-eyed, as though she had worked late the evening before; and the mystery was explained a few nights after, when, hearing sounds in the house after midnight, and fearing she knew not what, she equipped herself with great bravery for a search, and discovered both her father and mother still in their sitting-room, the one engaged in writing letters and the other in destroying a number of papers which appeared to contain reports of some kind.

After this revelation, Nadia kept her eyes open, and arrived before long at the conclusion that very few people came to the village, with the exception, of course, of the emissaries of M. Drakovics, who were not charged with messages of one kind or another for her parents. It seldom happened that a letter arrived by post, or was openly delivered; but pedlars and

travelling showmen, artisans wandering in search of work, and roaming gipsies, each and all seemed to have a secret understanding with the O'Malachy and his wife. Sometimes a sign, scarcely perceptible save to the initiated, would convey the needed information—sometimes, Nadia felt sure, letters were brought; but she never saw one change hands, nor came upon any trace of it afterwards. It was evident that any documents which might prove compromising were immediately and punctiliously burnt, and this precaution it was that baffled the men employed by M. Drakovics, who had no means of distinguishing the remains of burnt paper among the ashes raked out from the great stove.

Another curious fact which Nadia discovered about this time was the secret of the means by which her parents held their necessary consultations without attracting the attention of the spies by prolonged conferences, or wasting a portion of their working hours at night. Coming upon them one day in the sunny spot where they usually sat, she found her mother, as she thought, reading aloud in French; but the first words that reached her ear scarcely sounded as though they were drawn from the novel on Madame O'Malachy's knee.

"You see what Louis says: 'Our friend X. has come over at last. His Majesty's promises were too attractive. He engages to bring all his employés with him when the word is given.' This despatch must be sent on immediately. It will show that there are others upon whom we can depend beside the city guard. '*"Adorable Erminie!" s'écria Léonide, en se précipitant—*' What do you want, my daughter?"

Nadia delivered the message with which she was

charged from the landlord, and retired, and it was some time before she lighted on the meaning of this curiously disjointed sentence. It occurred to her at last, in one of those flashes of insight which sometimes present to the mind in a moment the solution of a mystery long pondered over in vain, that the adventures of Léonide and Erminie were merely a blind, and that when Madame O'Malachy was supposed by those who were set to watch her to be reading to her husband in French, she was in reality discussing with him the progress of their schemes. No thought of profiting by this discovery to penetrate into her parents' plans occurred to Nadia, and in any case the idea of acting as a spy would have been abhorrent to her; but even had she been anxious to probe more deeply the mystery of M. X. and his employés, her father and mother kept their secrets as carefully concealed from her as from the Thracian police-agents themselves. If the subject of Thracia was mentioned when she was in their company, it was merely as the text of a bantering discourse, conducted with more or less of good-humour on the O'Malachy's part, but punctuated with bitter reproaches on that of his wife. Neither of them could forgive Nadia for her folly in refusing Caerleon, when the acceptance of his proposal would have raised the whole family to affluence and distinction, although Madame O'Malachy resented much more strongly than her husband the loss of the material benefits promised by the match. His easy-going nature accepted serenely enough the change in the position of affairs, and the necessity of plotting against the man he had hoped to welcome as a son-in-law; but both he and his wife were careful to guard against giving Nadia any inkling of the consequences which might ensue to Thracia and

its king from her refusal. Although they never engaged in their mysterious work until she was out of the way, they would not run the risk of stimulating her curiosity by showing any eagerness to get rid of her, and allowed her to join them or not just as she pleased. But the certainty of finding herself either reproached or laughed at for the foolish way in which she had mismanaged what Madame O'Malachy called "*l'affaire Carlino*" made her only anxious to shun their society; and during the first few days of their stay at Witska she roamed about the garden alone, finding nothing to do but to recall the past, and feeling that she had nothing in the whole world to which to look forward. This being the case; it is not surprising that she caught herself one day wishing that she had not forbidden Caerleon so absolutely ever to renew his suit, but the discovery shocked and horrified her extremely.

"All my life I have been preparing to make a stand at some great crisis," she said to herself; "and now that it has come, I am giving way already. I must find something to do. Of what use is it to train myself to be a martyr, if I cannot bear a week's loneliness?"

She summoned all her resolution to enable her to meet this unexpected demand, and reviewed the state of affairs. With mingled shame and disgust she realised that she had been cherishing the vague thought that it was scarcely worth while to take up any settled work at present, and that this was owing to a half-hope that something might still happen to set things right and render her sacrifice unnecessary. It was a bitter disappointment to her to find that she could be so false to her dearest principles, and her first impulse

was to place her determination beyond the possibility of change. As a step in the desired direction, she tore up the letter she had been about to despatch to her godmother, Princess Soudaroff, and wrote another. She knew that of late her letters had been somewhat short and superficial, telling all the trivial pieces of news she could find, but never touching on the all-important subject which had engrossed the minds of her parents, from the moment of their first sight of Caerleon, to that of her parting from him at Bellaviste. It is true that both Caerleon and Cyril had found a casual mention in the earlier letters written from Janoszwar; but as time went on both names, and especially that of the elder brother, had dropped out of sight in a way that would have caused some idea of the truth to enter the mind of most women, but the Princess was not inclined to be suspicious by nature. Nadia's heart smote her now for her reticence, and she told her story to the Princess, suppressing only two material facts,—the name of her lover—this was due to her anxiety to behave fairly towards Caerleon,—and, as a natural corollary, her reason for refusing him. It must be confessed that she was not altogether sorry to be unable to lay the whole of the facts before her godmother; for although the Princess was very sympathetic in cases of conscience, she had a habit of looking at things differently from any one else, and Nadia had a lurking suspicion that in this case she might tell her that she had acted hastily, and ought to have asked advice. And this was merely what her own conscience hinted to her many times a-day. Before giving Caerleon her final answer she had been upheld by the expectation that the consciousness of having done right would bring her peace, if not happiness; but she now

knew little indeed of either feeling. This made her begin to doubt whether she might not have been led astray by her own conviction of the goodness of the deed; and the doubt returned again and again to make her wretched.

Her duty to her godmother performed, and her resolution placed beyond recall, Nadia told herself that her lack of occupation had undoubtedly made it easier for her to fail in steadfastness, and that she must find something to do. She would no longer remain all day in the inn garden, but would go out into the village and try to make friends with the people, and this not only by way of a moral medicine for herself, but as a duty which she had neglected hitherto. She could not at first speak the language of the villagers nor they hers; but the interest she showed in the children won her a way into the hearts of the women, and she discovered, much to her surprise, that when a child was sick or hurt she could do more for it than any one else in Witska. In times of health the little ones found her somewhat solemn and unapproachable, for although she longed to make friends with them, she was not one of those who can throw themselves heart and soul into the small interests which seem so momentous to children; but when they were ill the experience she had gained in Princess Soudaroff's cottage-hospital stood her in good stead. The nurses there had been wont to laugh at her as slow and clumsy; but at Witska, where there was no one to watch her with critical eyes, she succeeded in putting into practice the lessons she had learned. One or two cases of recovery from severe illness, which seemed miraculous to the villagers, but which were really due to patient nursing and modern methods of treatment, gained her a wide reputation, and appeals began to

reach her from outlying hamlets and solitary huts, entreating her to pay a visit to some sick child. When these requests were translated to her by the cosmopolitan waiter, she welcomed them eagerly, for they promised fresh work, and work was what she wanted. A wild desire would seize her now and again to see Caerleon's face once more, to hear his pleasant voice, to meet the glance, half puzzled, half amused, which he would cast at her when she had said anything that startled him. The vehemence of this longing for his presence alarmed her. She felt that she could almost volunteer to go to Bellaviste as a spy, if such a course would enable her to catch a glimpse of him; that she would be willing to meet the doom which Thracia kept for Scythian spies, if only she had seen him first. In this state of mind she welcomed the calls which came to her to take long mountain-walks and seek out distant families where a child lay ill, for the exertion of the day brought her back at night so tired that she was glad to go to bed and sleep the sleep of utter exhaustion. At first her long excursions drew upon her some opposition from her father.

"Sure it's not the thing," he said, "for a young lady to be roaming about alone like this. I won't allow ut."

"What would you have, O'Malachy?" asked his wife, scornfully. "Can we afford to engage a retinue to attend upon a girl who might be Queen of Thracia if she liked, and will not? Nothing will happen to her. She is a failure."

Left to her own devices in this unflattering way, Nadia gladly accepted the implied permission to pursue her lonely walks, attended only by one of the great dogs which were kept to protect the flocks from the wolves, and which had attached himself to her. She

saw no trace of the smugglers and outlaws of whom vague tales were current in the village; but one very real alarm beset her at times, of which she said nothing at home. It became evident to her by degrees that her proceedings were being watched. She would find herself tracked by pursuers of whom she could only obtain a glimpse by stratagem; and when she had learned to speak the language a little, she would hear at the cottages to which she was bound that a stranger had been there since her last visit, making inquiries as to the gracious lady and her doings. At first she was at a loss to imagine who could think her of sufficient importance to dog her steps in this way; but presently it dawned upon her that M. Drakovics, who still declined to be persuaded that she was not engaged in a conspiracy against Caerleon, had instructed his emissaries to keep an eye on her. This solution of the mystery satisfied herself; and as no one else appeared to notice anything unusual, she was not obliged to parry the remarks of others. The shepherds warned her to be careful, and not to stray from the beaten track, lest she should run into danger; but she knew that the wolves were not likely to venture from their fastnesses as yet, and, moreover, her mother's words echoed bitterly in her ears. Nothing would happen to her, or, if it did, it would not signify. She was a failure. And yet, while her heart sank lower, she refused to allow herself to contemplate the possibility of reversing her decision. If she could bring Caerleon back to her with a word, she would not utter it, to ruin him and his kingdom. What he had called her mania for martyrdom was still strong upon her, and the more fervently she longed to reverse her decision the more sternly she crushed down the pain.

But there was a harder battle in store for her than the fight she fought daily with herself, and she was obliged to face it when she was weakest. The news had just reached her through a German newspaper of Caerleon's initiation of the temperance legislation which she had pressed upon him, and it recalled to her mind his forecast of the difficulties of the work, and the appeal he had made to her to help him in it. Then she had received a letter from her godmother, overflowing with kindness, but containing a little gentle chiding.

"Why should you not be more frank with me, my child?" the Princess wrote. "Surely you know that if in any way I could help you, it would be my delight to do so, and yet you leave me to receive through a stranger an appeal on your behalf. I had a visitor this morning in the shape of Madame Bourenine, whom you know by name as the confidante of the Empress. She said that she had come to talk to me about the love-affair of Nadia Mikhailovna, but she mentioned no other names. Nor did I, for I knew none. After some conversation leading to nothing in particular, she inquired at last whether, if the obstacles to your marriage could be removed, I should be willing to give it my sanction. Knowing only that you had felt it your duty to refuse your lover for some reason with which I was not acquainted, what could I say but that if you thought it right to marry him I should be delighted to help you in any way I could? After receiving this answer, she left me, apparently satisfied. But, my child, have I deserved to be treated in such a way? Why should Madame Bourenine know more of your affairs than I? I do not ask for your confidence if you feel it right to withhold it, but I pray you to understand that no one

on earth can desire your happiness and your best good more than I. I commit you to God's keeping, dear child."

After receiving this letter Nadia started on one of her mountain expeditions with her mind in a whirl. Who could the persons be that were interesting themselves in the state of affairs between her and Caerleon, and what was their motive for doing so? She puzzled herself with these questions in vain as she walked; but when she returned to the inn at a somewhat earlier hour than usual, she found that they were destined to a speedy solution. Entering the sitting-room, she was surprised to see a stranger talking to her parents,—a smooth and polished gentleman, with a highly waxed moustache. A conviction that she had seen him somewhere before came over her as she paused just inside the door; but she could not at the moment identify him with any one she knew.

"And this is mademoiselle!" said the stranger, an almost imperceptible smile curling the ends of his moustache as he saw her standing erect and astonished in the doorway, with her plain tweed dress damp and muddy, and her hair blown about by the wind.

"Yes, M. le Prince, it is my daughter," said Madame O'Malachy, and Nadia noticed a repressed excitement in her manner. "Nadia, Vladimir Alexandrovitch has been so good as to pay us a visit here on his return journey from Czarigrad to Pavelsburg, entirely on your account."

"Mademoiselle and I are not wholly unknown to each other," said the visitor. "At one time I had the felicity of meeting her tolerably often at my sister-in-law's house. If she does me the honour to recollect

me, she may remember that even in those days I ventured to prophesy that she would be a beautiful woman; but I was not happy enough to discern that her *beaux yeux* would exercise an influence on the history of Europe."

Nadia's brow grew stormy. She had now a very clear recollection of the elegant young man who had been wont to torment with compliments and caresses the shy, passionate little girl who followed his sister-in-law wherever she went, and also of her relief when circumstances had removed him from her neighbourhood. There was no very close intercourse nowadays between Princess Soudaroff and her brother-in-law, although the relations between them were perfectly friendly. The present Prince was not a member of the Cercle Evangélique.

"I fear I am an unfortunate messenger," he went on, with a covert smile as he noticed the change in Nadia's expression. "I have prejudiced mademoiselle against me already. But I would ask her to believe that I am here purely in the hope of being able to render some service to her and to the gentleman who is so happy as to possess her heart."

"How dare you say that?" cried Nadia, angrily.

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle. I remember that in the old days you used to prefer plain speaking to polite circumlocutions, and as only your own family are present, I have ventured to come to the point at once. It cannot, surely, be a secret to your respected parents that, with a generosity which does you infinite credit, you have declined the addresses of the person who is at present in possession of the throne of Thracia, for fear lest a marriage with you should endanger his future career?"

"I have never told you anything of the kind," said Nadia, sharply, "and I am sure the King of Thracia has not. I cannot tell how you have found it out."

"Ah, these wicked newspapers!" murmured the Prince, smiling gently at Nadia's unintentional admission, "they publish everything. But if you assure me that they have been misinformed, mademoiselle, I can only resign the hope of serving you which has brought me here, and depart, entreating your forgiveness for having troubled you."

"They were not misinformed. It is quite true that the King asked me to marry him, and that I refused," said Nadia, bluntly.

"So I imagined, mademoiselle. I felt convinced that such a magnificent self-renunciation could not be merely a creation of fancy. But there is no reason," he went on quickly, as she rejected his praise with a gesture of impatience, "why your delicacy should be alarmed by the thought that your admirable conduct has become known. It has won you friends all over Europe, and I may mention that in Scythia persons in a very exalted position have been much pleased with the spirit which you displayed under extremely trying circumstances, and have even been led to wonder whether it might not be possible to avert the difficulties which you feared might result from the marriage proposed to you. Pray sit down, mademoiselle,"—he rose and handed her his chair, and she accepted it mechanically, for her limbs were trembling so violently that she could scarcely stand,—“and let us consider the matter. The sympathies of my sister-in-law, Pauline Vassilievna, have been engaged, and she testifies the greatest eagerness to assist in bringing the affair to a happy conclusion. May I take it for granted that the only obstacle to a

marriage between Lord Caerleon and yourself lay in these honourable scruples of yours?"

Nadia nodded silently, and he went on, watching her as a cat might watch a mouse.

"The first difficulty was caused, no doubt, by the difference of position? Well, I do not deny that between Nadia Mikhailovna and the King of Thracia there is a serious gap; but it is not so wide that it cannot be bridged. We can scarcely aspire to restore the ancient regal glories of your father's house," he smiled indulgently, "but his Majesty the Emperor has for some time entertained the desire of conferring on my good friend Colonel O'Malachy a patent of nobility, in recognition of his long and meritorious services; and between Lord Caerleon and the Countess Nadia, daughter of Count O'Malachy de Lisnacoola, there is no very great disparity of rank."

"But Carlino is King of Thracia," Nadia managed to say.

"Pardon me. I am aware that he calls himself king, but he has simply usurped the throne. He cannot be king without the consent of the Powers, and of Roum, the suzerain State. His so-called election is merely the work of an ignorant peasantry, led on by irresponsible agitators. The present condition of Thracia is a standing menace to European peace, and it cannot be suffered to continue. If this errand with which I am charged to you fails to bring about a settlement, Lord Caerleon must fall. He is nothing but an adventurer, a land-pirate."

"But," urged Nadia, more for the sake of gaining time than for any other reason, "if this patent of nobility is intended as a reward for my father's services, why should it not be granted to him in any case?"

"Sure that's the most sensible thing I've ever heard you say, Nadia," exclaimed the O'Malachy, with hearty approval, while his wife frowned angrily, and Prince Soudaroff looked a little nonplussed.

"You forget, mademoiselle, that the conferring of the patent would involve in this instance a grant of estates sufficient for the maintenance of the title, such as it would be invidious to bestow upon an officer of Colonel O'Malachy's standing in an isolated case, unless for very special reasons of State. But not only are those whom I represent willing to aid you in this way,—I am further authorised to promise that the Scythian ambassador at Czarigrad shall be instructed, if the marriage takes place, to support the Thracian claim for the confirmation by the Grand Signior of Lord Caerleon's election as king. The bride will thus have the satisfaction of bringing not only happiness to her husband, but peace and security to Thracia."

"But only the confirmation of King Carlino's election? Not the recognition of the right of the Thracians to elect their own king?"

"Certainly not, mademoiselle. Roum would be unable to accord such a recognition without the consent of the Powers, which would not be given under any circumstances."

"I can quite believe it. And now, M. le Prince, I know that in the political world nothing goes for nothing. What is the price to be paid for this kindness on the part of the Emperor?"

"Nadia!" cried her mother. "I am grieved—astonished——"

"Madame," said the Prince, with a deprecating wave of his hand, "when I undertook this errand I expected to be misunderstood. There are no conditions attached

to his Majesty's favours, mademoiselle. He gives without any desire of receiving in return. I do not say that he does not look for gratitude. His heart is so tender that even years of ruling and much bitter experience have not hardened it. He may well anticipate that some little attention would be paid to his wishes, some slight concessions made on the part of those who will owe so much to him; but that is all."

"Ah!" said Nadia, sharply. "And what are these concessions?"

"They are so slight, mademoiselle, that his Majesty is quite content to leave them in the background until matters are as happily arranged as you can desire—in other words, until your marriage with Lord Caerleon has taken place. On so joyful an occasion the sole anxiety of a man of generous impulses, such as I understand this unfortunately misguided nobleman to be, would be to take counsel with his bride as to the means by which he might testify some portion of his gratitude to the potentate to whom he owed his happiness."

"I see," said Nadia, crimson but persistent. "And it would be my part to suggest that these concessions should be made, as signs of our joint gratitude to the Emperor. But I must know something more about them. It would be impossible for me to recommend them to the King unless I had been told what they were."

"They are so slight, mademoiselle, as scarcely to be called concessions,—they would merely take the form of a graceful acknowledgment of the Emperor's kindness. Until this unhappy revolution occurred, the connection was so close between Scythia and Thracia that there will appear nothing strange in returning to the custom by which in all matters of foreign policy the

advice tendered by Scythia was followed by the Thracian Government. Again, Scythia has borne such a prominent part in organising the Thracian kingdom and in training the army that to appoint a Scythian officer as Minister of War would cause no surprise, and seem only natural."

"Ah!" said Nadia again, "and that is not all?"

"It is evident, mademoiselle, that while the present Ministry is in power in Thracia, the Emperor cannot feel towards that country the cordiality he would wish to entertain. It is to the interest of the Cabinet at present in office to oppose any tendency towards a reconciliation with Scythia, simply because their own position depends upon their maintaining a hostile attitude. But the matter will right itself. When the King shows his gratitude and friendliness towards Scythia in the two ways I have indicated, the Drakovics Ministry cannot remain in office. The Assembly will be dissolved, M. Drakovics will disappear as suddenly as he rose to power, and the King, assisted, if necessary, by Scythia, will obtain by means of a general election a more serviceable Government."

"By means of compulsion and forged voting-papers, I suppose," said Nadia. She had no reason to feel any special love for M. Drakovics; but he was an honest man and a patriot, and really anxious to do what seemed to him to be best both for Caerleon and Thracia. She rose from her chair, and spoke wearily: "I am sorry that I shall not have the opportunity of advising the King to accept your conditions, M. le Prince."

"There are no conditions, mademoiselle. What is desired is merely an honourable understanding that you will employ your influence over Lord Caerleon to induce him to comply with the Emperor's wishes in this direction."

"And into that understanding I cannot enter. I will not help to thrust the Thracians back into the bondage from which the revolution freed them. I will never advise the King to take the steps you propose, and I hope and believe that he would decline to listen to me if I did."

"Nadia, you are mad!" cried Madame O'Malachy, shrilly. "If you have no regard for your lover, will not the thought of your family move you? The old age of your parents and your brother's future would be secured by your accepting the gracious kindness you scorn."

"It is still possible that on mature consideration mademoiselle may change her mind," said Prince Soudaroff, looking calmly through a handful of papers which he took from his pocket. "His Majesty's offer will remain open for a week. But I cannot honestly advise any delay. We have merely to seek a *rapprochement* with Pannonia, and secure her opposition, instead of her neutrality, to the negotiations at Czarigrad, and the fate of Lord Caerleon and his 'kingdom' is sealed. Thracia is honeycombed with disaffection, and such a failure in foreign policy will precipitate matters. One more thought, mademoiselle. I told you just now that Lord Caerleon was a land-pirate. Have you recollected what is the fate of a captured pirate?"

"I had rather know that he was dead than saved by betraying the nation that trusted him," said Nadia, stoutly. No harassing doubts assailed her now. Such an offer as this could not but be refused.

"And again," the Prince went on, not heeding her words. "Lord Caerleon is only a man; and we men are not angels in constancy. Your refusal has made him miserable, it is true; but he will not remain long

in this state of mind. You have wounded his self-esteem ; you have shown him that there are certain things which you love better than you love him. It does not signify that these things are the highest and most creditable sentiments—he must be a very exceptional man who could endure to see them preferred to himself. And Lord Caerleon is not an exceptional man ; he is simply a young Englishman, half child and half barbarian, whose idea is that when he wants anything he must have it. You have denied him that on which he had set his heart, and very soon his one anxiety will be to punish you. I happen to know that M. Drakovics, his Minister, is doing his utmost to obtain for him the hand of some princess of a royal house. There is still time to win him back, for he loves you at present, in spite of the way in which you have treated him. But if you delay only a very few days you may be too late. Owing to your own cruelty, you may see your lover urged into a marriage with another woman, whom he does not love, but whom he is willing to accept in order to punish you. Or perhaps," with a smile, "you may see him marrying joyfully—who shall say ?—some royal lady who has succeeded in captivat-ing his inconstant heart, which was at your disposal if you would have received it, but cannot support your coldness."

"I can't help it!" cried Nadia, trembling from head to foot. "If I could withstand him, do you think I will listen to you? He is quite right to marry some one else; I told him to do it. Ah! if you wanted me to give way, you should have brought him here; but you would never dare to utter to his face the horrible lies you tell of him behind his back. I can only thank you for not putting me to the test."

"Would ut be quite impossible?" asked the O'Malachy, as she closed the door sharply behind her.

"Quite," returned his wife. "Drakovics and Milord Cyril watch over him night and day. No one is allowed to hold communication with him except through them."

"Yes," rejoined Prince Soudaroff, meditatively. "I fear King Carlino has had his last chance."

"I observe," said Madame O'Malachy, "that in your conversation with my daughter you made no allusion to the religious difficulty, M. le Prince."

"If so, madame, it is for the excellent reason that no religious difficulty exists. On the contrary, the fact that mademoiselle is a member of the Orthodox Church has contributed largely to induce the Emperor to suggest the terms I was authorised to offer."

"But sure the girl's a schismatic—an Evangelical, or whatever the fools call themselves?" cried the O'Malachy, while his wife nodded quickly.

"Pardon me, my dear colonel, but Scythian law makes no provision for schismatics. Mademoiselle was baptised in the Orthodox Church, and it is impossible for her to quit it. Her marriage, to be valid, must be celebrated according to the orthodox rite, and the Emperor and the clergy may be trusted not to lose the hold they would thus gain upon Thracia."

"That such a scheme should be wrecked by a girl's obstinacy!" cried Madame O'Malachy. "It is maddening!"

CHAPTER XVI.

WORDS FROM DYING LIPS.

PRINCE SOUDAROFF left Witska that afternoon, and the week allowed to Nadia for deliberation slipped away, but no message was sent to request him to return or to accept the offer with which he was charged. If he was mortified by this lack of success, he must have felt himself avenged a little later, when both his auguries of evil in turn proved true. The first hint of the fulfilment of his prophecy reached Nadia one morning when her mother threw a newspaper to her as she came into the sitting-room:

"Now I hope you are happy!" she said. "You have succeeded in bringing about the ruin of Thracia and your Carlino."

Nadia took up the paper, a German one, and read the piece of news which figured most prominently in its columns. The *rapprochement* which had taken place between the Emperors of Scythia and Pannonia was announced, and also the subsequent refusal by the Roumi Government to confirm Caerleon's election as king—the two events which had plunged Cyril and M. Drakovics into their complicated intrigues with Moesia. Mr Hicks had not yet given to the world the informa-

tion which he was to amass with so much astuteness, and therefore nothing was at present known of these negotiations, so that the paper only reflected the general opinion when it remarked that the cause of Thracia was already lost. Cyril was still an unknown quantity in Balkan politics; and although most people were acquainted to a certain extent with the resourcefulness and strength of will of M. Drakovics, they could not conceive it possible that even he could devise any means of tiding over such a crisis as this. Nadia did not venture to dissent from the universal opinion; but there was no sign of trembling in the hand which held the paper as she read through the announcement and the editorial comments upon it, and she looked round unfalteringly at her mother.

"I had rather that he should fall honourably than reign as a pensioner of Scythia," she said.

"You are a fool!" was Madame O'Malachy's angry answer. "Go and look after your sick brats. It is all you are fit for."

But three or four days later she came into Nadia's room early in the morning wearing an expression in which rage and triumph were mingled.

"You have indeed done well for yourself, mademoiselle!" she said, putting her hand on her daughter's shoulder as she slept and shaking her. "Your Carlino is to marry the Princess Ottile of Mœsia. The betrothal is to take place next week."

"It is not true!" cried Nadia, starting up in bed.

"It is most true. That touches you, does it not? This, then, is your faithful, your constant lover! He assures you of his undying affection, and six weeks after saying the words he betroths himself to another."

"He is quite right," said Nadia, recollecting herself.
"I told him to do it."

"I can quite believe it! But you never thought he would obey you," said Madame O'Malachy, putting down her candle and gazing with cruel certainty into her daughter's pale face. "Don't tell me that you did, mademoiselle. You might try to impose upon Prince Soudaroff with your exalted generosity, but you felt confident that Carlino would remain faithful to you. However, I may tell you this for your comfort. Your father has always believed hitherto that Carlino would refuse to accept his dismissal as final, and would try his fate again before long. But now, if he meets him he will kill him."

"Why?" asked Nadia, as calmly as she could. "He is only doing this in obedience to me."

"Why!" cried her mother. "Because he has insulted us, played with us, made us the laughing-stock of Europe. Although you may be a fool, your father knows how to avenge the honour of his house, and he will not fail to do it. You refused to share the Thracian throne; but it is Carlino who has put it out of his own power to offer you the crown a second time, and for this he must be rewarded as he deserves. In every way we are undone. Not only have we lost the position we might have held in Thracia, but this marriage will endanger the result of all our labours in Europe."

"Ah!" cried Nadia, assuming a sudden interest in politics in the vain hope of diverting from herself the gaze of her mother's glittering eyes, "it was this marriage that Vladimir Alexandrovitch was anxious to prevent. He foresaw the possibility of its taking place, and he knew that it would bring

Pannonia to the help of King Carlino. Thracia is saved, then!"

"Yes; and you——?" asked Madame O'Malachy, with her most merciless smile, as she retired from the room, half baffled by her daughter's resolution, but certain that she left a sting behind her. And this was indeed the case. Although Nadia had succeeded in making herself believe that she wished Caerleon to follow the advice she had given him, she discovered now that she had never expected him to do so. She had found an unspeakable comfort in remembering the indignant rebuke with which he had answered her when she told him that although he loved her, it was his duty to marry some other woman; and even now she sorrowed less for the fact that she was herself forsaken than that her lover had proved unstable. He had failed in faith; he was fearless and stainless no more. Well, no doubt it was better so. He was no longer hers, he had not been hers since they parted at Bellaviste; and if he was proved not to be the blameless knight she had imagined him, at least he was a wise king, and was preparing to take the only step by which it seemed possible to save his kingdom in the present crisis. Undoubtedly it was better so. But Nadia's heart and soul rose up in rebellion against this view of the case, and all day, as she followed the mountain-paths, or moved about inside the hut in which lay the sick child she was visiting, she was mourning in silence a trust betrayed, a high ideal shattered. It was her own fault, she knew; she had told him to forget her, but she had illogically expected him to disobey, and required him to be stronger morally than she was.

But after a day or two other things happened to

trouble her. It was generally known throughout Europe by this time that there was a difference of opinion between Scythia and Pannonia on the subject of Thracia, and that in all probability the interposition of Pannonia and her allies at Czarigrad would obtain a settlement of affairs in Caerleon's favour. This prospect served to stimulate the activity of the Thracian conspirators both at home and in exile, who had been lying low for a week or two, and watching the course of events, but now realised that they could not look to the Powers to do their business for them. The O'Malachy and his wife became increasingly busy, much to the alarm of Nadia, who felt certain that they contemplated delivering some blow, the nature of which she could not divine, against the Thracian kingdom. At last the O'Malachy left Witska on urgent business, and she gathered that his destination was Pavelsburg, although she could only guess at his probable errand there. Nor were her anxieties allayed one day when she found her mother reading with much irritation a newspaper which had just arrived by the post.

"There seems to be no end to the annoyance you bring upon us, Nadia," said Madame O'Malachy. "As if your foolishness was not enough, your father must needs improve upon it for the benefit of the newspapers. It must have been after dinner, I suppose, as usual. No doubt they gathered round him and drank wine with him, and flattered and sympathised with him, until he was ready to tell them anything. I cannot trust him alone for a day, and yet I cannot leave Witska. Pig! ass! why does he not see that in recounting this pitiful story he forgets that Louis is in Bellaviste, in the Palace itself, and must stay there?"

"What has my father been saying?" asked Nadia, her colour changing.

"Merely parading you before the eyes of Europe as a forsaken heroine," replied Madame O'Malachy, tearing the offending newspaper briskly across, and throwing the fragments into the stove; "but I will put a stop to that. Give me those telegraph-forms."

Surprised by her mother's unaccustomed confidence in her, Nadia obeyed, and was further astonished to find herself consulted as to the wording of the telegram which was to warn the O'Malachy not to repeat his indiscretion, but to maintain a strict silence on the subject of his daughter in future. Several forms were wasted before the message satisfied Madame O'Malachy, but she did not breathe freely until Nadia had taken it to the post-office. As soon as she had time to think, she made a mental resolution to seize any papers other than merely local ones which might enter the house, and destroy them before Nadia could see them. This measure was imperatively necessary, if there was to be any peace in the family; for even her intrepid spirit quailed when she pictured to herself the scene which would ensue if Nadia discovered the construction which the O'Malachy, or the reporters of his words, had placed upon Caerleon's treatment of her. To Madame O'Malachy, whose common-sense was one of her strongest points, the state of mind in which her husband could choose to boast of the long-past glories of his race, while he did his best at the same moment to proclaim that his daughter had been most cruelly jilted, was incomparably absurd, and the telegram she sent him was short and sharp. The injury inflicted upon Nadia's future by the publication of a report such as he had set on foot touched her keenly, for all her

hopes for old age were based upon the possibility of her daughter's making a brilliant marriage; and to have her name bandied about in such a connection could not but militate against her prospects. Trouble caused by an incident of this kind she could understand and sympathise with, while Nadia's refusal of Caerleon and the reasons for it were a sealed book to her, and she was unusually kind to the girl during that day and the next. But on the second evening her sympathy seemed to have exhausted itself, for her manner once more became brusque and her tone sarcastic, and Nadia, whose spirits had risen under the influence of the change in her mother, realised that her presence was no longer desired in the sitting-room. As she opened the door a sudden impulse made her return to the table at which Madame O'Malachy was busied with her writing materials.

"If you are planning anything against *him*, spare him for my sake," she said in a low voice, and stopped suddenly, amazed at her own temerity.

"Go to bed; you are a little fool," returned her mother, scathingly.

Nadia's sleep was much disturbed that night. Two or three times she thought she heard stealthy steps in the passage, and once the unmistakable sound of the shutting of a door. She could not rid herself of the idea that some deadly blow was being prepared against Caerleon; there were evil possibilities in the slightest noise that reached her ears as she lay awake trembling and listening. She cried herself to sleep at last, and was only awakened in the morning by a voice at her door.

"Fräulein! Fräulein!"—the agitated accents were

those of the many-tongued waiter,—“pray come down at once. The gracious Frau Oberstin has met with an accident. Boris the cowherd found her lying on the hillside just now, and they are bringing her in.”

Startled and horrified, Nadia threw on a dressing-gown, and rushed down-stairs. The passage was filled with the hangers-on of the inn, who made way for her to pass into one of the smaller rooms on the ground-floor, into which a figure wearing the dress of the country-people had just been carried on a stretcher. Nadia looked round in amazement. This was a peasant woman, not her mother. But from the motionless form came a well-known voice.

“You need not look so terrified, my daughter. I am not injured, merely too stiff to move. Absolutely I cannot stir a foot. It is evident that I have been walking in my sleep again. You remember that it is an old trick of mine? I suppose you must send for a doctor, for form’s sake, but pray do not let any one be alarmed.”

It appeared that there was a doctor to be found at a little town some miles distant, and a messenger was despatched at once to bring him to Witska, while Nadia did her best to make her mother comfortable. Assisted by an excited maid-servant, who insisted on relating in bad German how it had happened to her, some weeks before, to meet the Frau Oberstin coming along the balcony at night with a candle in her hand and a fixed look in her eyes, she brought down a bedstead from one of the upper rooms, and succeeded in lifting Madame O’Malachy and placing her upon it, the sufferer still protesting that she felt no pain whatever, merely an inability to move. Nadia’s mind was occupied with the problem presented by the accident. If her mother had

only been walking in her sleep, how had it happened that she had laid aside her own dress and put on the peasant costume? The place where she had been found was at the foot of a precipitous incline on which there abutted one of the walls of the garden belonging to the inn. Between the wall and the margin of the steep was a narrow ledge, affording just room for a sure-footed person to pass along it. It was unlikely that a sleep-walker would light upon this track without having seen it before; but any one who was bound on secret or important business would find it an excellent means of reaching the road which led down the mountain without being seen from the village. Was it possible that Madame O'Malachy had been carrying treasonable letters in disguise when a chance slip had made her lose her footing?

This was the question which, try as she would, Nadia could not succeed in banishing from her mind during the earlier part of the day, but when the doctor arrived he gave a new direction to her thoughts. He was a taciturn man, and asked so few questions that Madame O'Malachy set him down as a fool; but when his examination was over he made a sign to Nadia to accompany him out of the room.

"Where is the Herr Oberst?" he asked. "I understand from the landlord that he is away."

"I think he must be in Scythia," answered Nadia. "He went to Pavelsburg on important business, but I do not know whether he is there still."

"He should be summoned at once," said the doctor.

"But he will return in a few days," said Nadia, astonished. "You don't wish me to telegraph to him? That would make him think that my mother was dangerously ill——"

"Yes?" said the doctor, with an intonation that made her start and shiver.

"But she is not even severely hurt! She has absolutely no pain!" she cried, frantically.

"That is the worst symptom in the case," he replied, in his most repressive and business-like tone. "She is suffering from paralysis, caused by——" And he entered into a learned disquisition on the exact nature of the injury sustained, culminating in the fact that the paralysis, which was now confined to the lower limbs, must necessarily creep upwards by degrees until it reached a certain point, after which—— He paused, and Nadia, who had been listening like one in a dream, forced herself to ask the question—

"And how long — how long will it be before this point is reached?"

"It may be to-night, it may be to-morrow," he answered. "Therefore, if I may advise you, send your telegram immediately."

In a stunned condition she returned into the room to ask her mother the O'Malachy's address, only to be met by the question why she wanted it.

"The doctor thought he ought to know that you were ill," she murmured.

"But why?" asked Madame O'Malachy. "He must not be sent for unless it is absolutely necessary. Did the doctor say it was necessary?" she added, quickly.

Nadia bowed her head, unable to speak. For a moment her mother's eager eyes searched her face keenly, then closed, as though in utter weariness.

"You will find your father's address on an envelope in my desk. Go and send your telegram, then bring the desk here to me. I will rest a little."

"But when Nadia returned to the room, her mother

did not seem inclined to rest. She made her tear up a number of papers and burn them, then sent her upstairs for others, which were treated in the same way. Nadia had no opportunity of saying a word. At last, when the papers were all disposed of, she screwed her courage to the point of asking whether she should read aloud a little.

"If you like," returned Madame O'Malachy, indifferently. "You will find on my toilet-table the novel I was reading. I may as well finish it."

"Oh, not that, to-day!" entreated Nadia.

"And why not?" asked her mother. "If not that, nothing, thank you."

No more could be said, and Nadia remained silent, feeling that she had wasted an opportunity. All that could be done during the day for her mother's comfort she did, feeling all the time humbly and unhappily conscious that she was not a good nurse. Her movements were too deliberate, no one could call her *deft*, and she felt sure that mistakes which passed unnoticed by her sick children and their parents were setting her mother's teeth on edge at this moment. There was no one to give her any real help, although the people of the inn did what they could. The doctor had departed immediately after giving his verdict, and would not return until late at night, for he was an over-worked general practitioner, and was gone to visit several cases in a different direction, in which his ministrations might possibly prove effective, while for this patient nothing could be done. Even if the O'Malachy were still to be found at the address to which the telegram had been sent, he could not be expected at Witska for three days at least, and it was by no means certain that he had not left before it could reach him. Nadia

felt utterly lonely. Wearyed and inexpressibly miserable, she sat down by the stove in the dusk, longing to say something, she knew not what, to her mother, to break down, even at this eleventh hour, the barrier of silence which their lives had raised between them. But she was tongue-tied, and it was Madame O'Malachy who spoke first.

"Turn your face this way a little, my daughter, that I may see you. No; I cannot understand it. Tell me, what was it about you that attracted the notice of King Carlino?"

"I don't know," said Nadia, humbly. "I think it was only that he loved me."

"Yes; but why did he love you?" resumed Madame O'Malachy. "You do not make the most of yourself, you have no conversation, you make no effort to be agreeable. Is it that he admired your plainness of speech, which I, for one, call brutal?"

"Perhaps, a little," said Nadia. "Not altogether, certainly."

"You seem very doubtful," said her mother. "Have you never asked yourself these interesting questions? How are you to retain your influence over men if you have no idea of the means by which you first attracted their attention—their admiration?"

"I don't want to obtain influence over men," said Nadia, in a choking voice. "My own life has not been so successful that I need make any more efforts to direct others."

"That exactly proves the truth of what I was saying," said Madame O'Malachy. "Tell me," she added suddenly—"do you still love this young man?"

Nadia dropped on her knees by the bedside, and hid her face in the coverlet. "It is cruel to ask me," she

sobbed, "when he is going to marry the Princess of Mcesia ; but I do."

"I hear that he looks most unhappy, and appears to loathe the engagement into which he has undoubtedly been forced," said her mother. Nadia raised her clasped hands in wild appeal.

"Oh, don't tell me that!" she cried. "Let me feel at least that he is happy, whatever becomes of me. I pray every day that they may love each other, and that their marriage may be a blessing to Thracia and to themselves."

"You bear no malice against him, then?"

"How could I? He is doing what I felt must be right."

"You would not wish him to be punished? If you knew of any danger——"

"Oh, mother!" she looked up with a cry. "I would walk barefoot to Bellaviste to warn him, even if he was to be married to-morrow. You have not joined in any plot to injure him?"

"Hush! I cannot tell you now. I must speak to your father, if he returns in time. Leave me alone with him when he comes, and I will tell you afterwards. If he does not return, I will tell you before the end."

Nadia returned to her place, and they talked no more until the sounds of bustle outside announced an arrival.

"It is your father," said Madame O'Malachy; "I hear his voice. Besides," as Nadia's face showed signs of incredulity, "no one else would arrive so late. His business must have taken a shorter time than we anticipated, and no doubt he started on his return journey two days ago, and so missed the telegram."

Nadia went out, and found the O'Malachy in the

passage, engaged in hearing from the waiter what had occurred. He looked anxious and worried.

"This is a bad businuss, Nadia," he said. "Where is your mother?"

Nadia took him into the room, and, mindful of her mother's injunction, left them alone together. From her post in the passage she could hear their voices, her mother's anxious and pleading, the O'Malachy's gruff and obdurate. After a time he opened the door and called to her to come in, telling her to get him something to eat, but refusing to yield to her suggestion that he should take his meal in another room. Presently he sent her away to unpack his portmanteau and get out what he needed, and then he himself saw the doctor, and received his assurance that there would be no marked change in the patient's condition before morning. Nadia had made preparations for sitting up with her mother; but he ordered her peremptorily to bed, and declared his intention of taking the night-watch himself. It was evident that he did not mean to leave her alone with Madame O'Malachy for a moment, and her anxiety became keen. A look from her mother warned her to obey, and she left the room, but lingered in the passage. Presently she heard Madame O'Malachy urging her husband to make himself comfortable in the cushioned chair which had been brought down for him, and rest a little after his journey, and before very long there was perfect silence in the room. Nadia opened the door softly, and peeped in. A low "Hush!" from her mother brought her noiselessly to the side of the bed, where Madame O'Malachy lay wide awake, while the O'Malachy was beginning to give audible evidence of having fallen asleep in his chair.

"Kneel down here," whispered Madame O'Malachy, "where your father cannot see you if he wakes. Nadia, I have been trying to induce him to abandon the plot we had arranged—so much of it, at least, as threatens Carlino's life—but he will not consent. He has got hold of the idea that the King and Lord Cyril were playing with him all the time we were at Bellaviste, and he says he will not allow himself to be made a fool in the eyes of Europe. He will not consent to relinquish his revenge."

"And you have arranged to murder the King?" gasped Nadia. "Oh, mother!"

"What did you say, Barbara?" asked the O'Malachy, sitting up and looking round sharply. "If you want anything, don't be afraid of asking me for it. Sure I wasn't asleep, but I can't get the noise of the train out of me ears."

"Thanks, O'Malachy, I want nothing," returned his wife, and he settled himself once more in his chair; but it was some time before the two women ventured to begin their conversation afresh.

"If you wish to save the King," Madame O'Malachy whispered, "listen to me now. The betrothal is to take place the day after to-morrow, and two days later Carlino will return to Bellaviste. On a certain day soon after his return he is to inspect the garrison of Tatarjé—that is, if he escapes your father. There are two routes to the town, and it is at present doubtful which he will choose. Louis is to discover this, and to let your father know. When a letter comes from him, and your father leaves this place on any pretext, you will know what is intended, and it is for you to warn the King, if you are still in the same mind."

"But why not write at once and caution Lord Cyril?" asked Nadia.

"Because we have confederates in the post-office, and your letter would be stopped. We are not alone, Nadia. The conspiracy is an extensive one, with ramifications throughout the whole of Thracia, and supporters in Scythia. It will take its course, but I will help you to save your Carlino's life if I can."

"But must I denounce my father to save him?" asked Nadia, horrified.

"Never! You will merely tell the King not to visit Tatarjé on that day, or if he must go, to alter his route. The change of plan will at once become known to Louis, and he will warn your father that the plot has been discovered, and that he must escape. Or if, through any mischance, he should be away, do you telegraph at once to Mr F. X. O'Reilly, at Tatarjé, 'Go to Pavelsburg immediately, and await further orders there.' Your father will understand. He is to pass at Tatarjé as an English newspaper correspondent, come to see the inspection, and he will leave at once."

"But is the rest of the plot to take its course?"

"Certainly. I tell you nothing, and you know nothing. I am not betraying anything that is indispensable to it. It was Louis who suggested to your father that it would ensure the success of the revolt if Carlino were got rid of first of all, and your father caught at the idea at once. It is entirely the fulfilment of his private revenge, and all the arrangements have been our work alone, though there is no doubt that the removal would be welcomed by the other parties to the conspiracy, however eagerly they might appear to reprobate it in deference to public opinion. It is with reference to this alone that I will aid you;

but once the alarm is given, the King's friends will look after his life carefully enough. In the revolution, when it arrives, he must take his chance; but if he falls, it will be in fair fight, not by a shot fired from an ambush. Only be sure that when you warn him, you give your message either to Lord Cyril or to himself. They would believe you, but M. Drakovics would put you in prison in the hope of obtaining further information. And you must go to Bellaviste in disguise, for fear Louis should recognise you. In any case, keep out of his way; he would not allow you to spoil his plans."

"But why do you all hate the King in this way?" asked Nadia, tearfully.

"Your father hates him because he thinks he overreached him in the matter of his proposing to you. If it had not been for this engagement to Princess Ottolie, he would have been most anxious that his life should be spared, hoping that he might yet return and marry you. But Louis does not hate him—it is merely a matter of business. He is at Bellaviste to bring about a revolution, and he will do so more easily if Carlino is out of the way. He finds your father incensed against him, and immediately proposes to himself to take advantage of his desire for revenge to kill Carlino. No; he is not sacrificing his father—" as Nadia raised a horrified face. "Do you think that I would have permitted such a thing? The arrangements for escaping from the spot and leaving the country in safety are so complete that it would be almost impossible for your father to be captured, or even for his share in the—execution—to be known,—unless," and Madame O'Malachy smiled with a trace of her old sarcastic spirit, "he told the story himself.

But neither do I hate Carlino. I have almost a liking for him; but he is weak—he lets slip his chances. If he had married you, I would have done anything for him; but he allowed you, with your absurd scruples, to send him away. If he had been a *man*, he would have laughed at you. He should have made you marry him, and then you would have liked him all the better for his roughness."

"I should not!" cried Nadia, with flashing eyes. "I should have hated him, despised him. How could I like him if he made me do what I felt to be wrong?"

"Gently!" said her mother, as the O'Malachy stirred and muttered in his sleep. "Now you are beyond me. I speak only from experience, you from imagination, which is naturally far more trustworthy. But your father is uneasy. If he finds you here he will be ready to kill us both. Creep out quietly."

"Let me stay with you here," entreated Nadia. "I will be very quiet,—I will not speak. I—I should like to know you better. You have been so good to me to-day."

"It is too late," returned her mother. "I also—there are many things which one could wish to change, looking at them to-night. But one cannot do it now."

"But—let me ask you just this—are you——"

"No; I know what you would say, but I cannot listen. You are Protestant, I Catholic. But you may pray for me if you like. Now go."

Nadia rose and kissed her silently, and went out. The longing which both she and her mother had just put into words was strong upon her. If only they could have changed so many things! But it was too late.

Old counsels of her godmother's, Caerleon's little-heeded remonstrances, came thronging back into her mind as she gained her own room and sank down upon a chair. She bowed her head upon the table, and sobbed.

"It is all my fault!" she said. "I never know how much reason I have to love any one before it is too late. Oh, if it may not be too late for her!"

CHAPTER XVII.

MINE AND COUNTERMINE.

IT was broad daylight when the tinkling of a little bell aroused Nadia. Rising stiff and cramped from the uncomfortable position in which she had fallen asleep, kneeling beside her bed, she went to the window, which looked into the courtyard of the inn. A priest, followed by a youthful acolyte, was picking his way across the square towards the gate—not the Greek pope of the village, but a Roman Catholic priest from Boloszjen, the town from which the doctor came—and it was the boy who was ringing the bell she had heard. Divining at once that the priest had been summoned to administer the last sacraments to her mother, she hastened downstairs, to find the O'Malachy and the travelled waiter talking in low voices in the passage.

"And the gracious young lady was not even awakened?" she heard the waiter ask.

"*À quoi cela servirait-il? Mademoiselle est Protestante,*" replied the O'Malachy, and the words fell on Nadia's ear without conveying any impression to her mind. She advanced towards her mother's door, and the waiter made a hasty movement as though to prevent her from entering the room, but she passed

him and went in. Then she realised what had happened.

Stepping noiselessly, she drew back the sheet from the quiet form upon the bed, and wondered at the expression of the face. Was it the hand of death alone that had stamped upon the beautiful features the serenity which had never characterised them in the stormy days of life? Or had God spoken to the soul in the silent hours of the night, when no human watcher was at hand, and the friendly and engrossing sounds of earth were hushed for the time, and was the priest's anointing only a feeble emblem of the peace of God which passeth all understanding? Nadia felt no inclination to weep as she gazed upon the dead face. "Two hands upon the breast, and labour is past"—the Scythian proverb recurred to her mind, and she felt a sudden lightening of the load that had weighed her down since the first intimation of her mother's danger had reached her. The issue was not hers, it belonged to God—God, who knew all the circumstances of Barbara O'Malachy's life, the bad training, the evil influences, and in later years, the dead weight of an ill-spent past, and the constant companionship of one who owed it to her efforts that he had preferred the rewards of dis-honour to a hero's death.

What must have been the full effect of such a companionship Nadia did not wholly realise until the O'Malachy entered the room, and found her still standing and gazing entranced. She dropped the sheet as he came up to the bed.

"She looks so peaceful," she said, with a break in her voice, "but I wish I had been here. You might have sent for me when you saw that she was worse."

"Sure there was not time," replied the O'Malachy,

lamely enough. "It was not until daylight that I saw how nearly she was gone, and then I could think of nothing but sending for Father John immediately."

Nadia looked at him in silence, reading in his stumbling excuses the fear which had influenced him that even at the last her mother might find means to warn her of the plot against Caerleon's life, and understanding that this had been his reason for keeping her away. She wished now that she had braved his anger, and insisted on remaining in the room all night, and yet a quarrel in the very presence of the dying could have done no possible good to any one. She looked at him again as he stood shifting his position uneasily at the foot of the bed, and she read in his face not only the grief which she had expected to find there, but also something else, something that was more like annoyance.

"I want to speak to you, Nadia, if you'll come into the parlour," he said. "There are some arrangements we ought to get settled."

"Can't we leave them for a little while—just to-day?" asked Nadia.

"Time is a luckshury that we don't possess," answered her father, opening the door for her, and motioning her out. "I may likely be called away any moment."

"Not before the—the funeral?" asked Nadia, in horror.

"I hope not; but if a letter comes to summon me on important businuss, it stands to reason that I must go. I have arranged for the funeral to take place to-morrow afternoon."

"To-morrow? so soon?" cried Nadia.

"Sure is it not better that I would be here for ut

than not? Your blessud mother knew all about the work I'm on, and she would not have had me leave ut. I am thinking of sending you back to Princess Soudaroff, Nadia. When you came to us she said she would be glad to have you again any time."

Nadia's heart leapt, but she reproached herself immediately for her gladness. "If you would only let me stay with you, I should like it better."

"Stay with me?" echoed the O'Malachy. "Is it taking on your mother's part of the work you mean? I'd not have thought you had the gifts for ut."

"Oh no, not that!" said Nadia, earnestly. "Father, won't you give it up? You have your pay, and you could go back to your regiment, and I could keep house for you."

"Is it settling down to parades and courts-martial she means?" asked the O'Malachy in astonishment. "She might have been Queen of Thracia, and she talks of beginning life again on a linesman's pay for the two of us, in some dirty hole of a Scythian garrison town! Sure it's little you know of ut, mademoiselle."

"I don't mind how dull it is, or how poor we are," urged Nadia, thrilled with the hope of detaching her father from his present mode of life.

"But sure I do," was his instant response. "How do you think I could enjure ut at all after the life your blessud mother and I have led? You are just five-and-thirty years too late in your praise of poverty."

"But my mother——" began Nadia. He cut her short.

"I'd have you remember, Nadia, that what I am your mother made me, and if she did show the white feather just at the end, sure 'twas the first time in her life—or maybe the second," he added, meditatively;

"and 'tis not likely I will change me ways before I'm on me deathbed, as she was. No, I have me work, and I'll keep to ut. I will write to the Princess about you, and you'll be better to telegraph to let her know you are coming."

"Not just yet," pleaded Nadia; "I am very anxious to stay here as long as I can."

The O'Malachy looked pleased. "Sure we'll not be partud altogether at all," he said. "If all goes well in Thracia, I'll come and see you, and we'll maybe find ut possible to set up housekeeping together in some place."

Nadia shuddered. "If all went well in Thracia," meant to her father that when they next met, Caerleon's blood would be between them. She changed the subject hastily.

"Will you telegraph to Louis, father, or shall I?"

"Ah, it wouldn't be a bad thing to have um here," responded the O'Malachy thoughtfully. "But no. Louie is a soldier, and he must not leave his duty. I'll not have ut said that Michael O'Malachy called his son away from the work he had to do. I'll write to um meself."

The day dragged slowly by, and the next followed like it. The O'Malachy was restless and uneasy, dividing his time between making up arrears of correspondence and watching the road which led up the mountain. To Nadia, who knew what he must be expecting, and what arrangements his letters were intended to make, this period of inaction was almost unbearable, but it was not until shortly before the funeral that she found how deeply the suspense had tried her. Feverishly anxious to go out, to do anything that might relieve the tension of the long hours, it cost her a flood of tears and a sharp wordy battle when she found that she was not

intended to follow her mother to the grave. The O'Mal-
achy was inflexible. In Ireland, he said, ladies never
attended funerals, and he would not have things done
otherwise than decently here because they were out
on a God-forsaken hill in a desolate (he pronounced it
daysolut) country. Too much exhausted to contend
longer, Nadia yielded at last to the imperious dictates
of propriety, and declining the landlady's offer of her
company, betook herself to solitude and a quiet corner
of the inn garden.

She had been sitting there for some time, in a spot
quite concealed from any one in the house by bushes and
an intervening angle of wall, and the sad procession had
wound its way out of sight and hearing, when she was
startled by a persistent rustling in the boughs of a large
tree which overhung the parapet near her. At this
season of the year it was bare of leaves, but its branches
were still so thickly covered with ivy that they con-
cealed the cause of the disturbance as completely as if
they had been laden with their native foliage, and the
effect was sufficiently alarming. In the strained state
of her nerves, Nadia's first impulse was to take to flight
and seek refuge in the house; but she summoned up all
her courage, and walked boldly towards the tree, asking,
in the best Thracian she could muster—

“ Is there any one here ? ”

There was no answer, but she heard a further rust-
ling immediately over her head, and looking up quickly,
caught sight of a man peering at her through the screen
of ivy. For a moment they remained staring at one
another, and then the intruder, feeling apparently that
there was no possibility of concealing himself further,
bent down towards her, and asked in a low voice in
German—

"The gracious lady is related to the Herr Oberst O'Malachy?"

"Yes," said Nadia, astonished by the contrast between the speaker's dress and his words. His appearance was that of a wandering artisan seeking for work, but his voice was gentlemanly and his accent refined.

"Then may I trouble her to hand to the Herr Oberst in private a small packet? I was charged to deliver it only to himself or to the gracious lady, and I have waited here for hours, hoping to see one or other of them in the garden, for there is one of Drakoviç's spies hanging about in front of the inn. Happily I found my way up the mountain by a shepherd's path, and he did not see me, but I was beginning to wonder whether I must stay here until it was dark, and then manage to climb up to the balcony and tap at the Herr Oberst's window. The attempt would have been both unpleasant and dangerous, and I cannot be too thankful that fate directed the gracious lady's steps to this part of the garden."

A flood of thoughts rushed across Nadia's mind as she stood on tiptoe and held out her hand for the letter, listening to what the messenger said without hearing it. This man was one of the Thracian conspirators. Even now he was acting as an emissary of Louis's, and carrying despatches to the various persons who were engaged in the plot. Despatches!—had not her mother warned her that the O'Malachy was expecting a message from Louis, a message which was to inform him of the route by which Caerleon would enter Tatarjé, a message which would enable him to carry out the dreadful deed he was contemplating? This man had brought it. It was for him that the O'Malachy had been watching since his return from Pavelsburg, but he had counted upon inter-

cepting him either in going to or returning from the grave if he arrived to-day, for it was evident that he had not discovered the presence of the secret agent in the village street. And his refusal to let Nadia attend the funeral — the prohibition which had cost her so many tears — had been the means of placing in her power the precious scrap of paper on which, humanly speaking, hung Caerleon's life ! It did not at the moment occur to her, what was indeed the case, that the messenger had mistaken her for her mother, and had thus given her the note without any misgiving; but as soon as the envelope was in her hand, a cold chill ran through her. How was she to find out what it contained ? To suppress the letter would mean the ruin of her only chance of helping Caerleon if the action were discovered, while to open it, read it, and close it again, would be dishonourable. And yet—and yet—surely if such an action could ever be justifiable, it was so in this case. Her fingers closed upon the flap of the envelope ; it would be easy, when once the messenger had departed, to soften the gum with a little hot water and examine the letter, but the teaching of a lifetime was too strong for her, and she repulsed the temptation in horror. The next moment another thought occurred to her, which differed from the first, although she did not see this at the time, in degree rather than in kind.

"Was there any verbal message," she asked, "to be delivered in case you were taken prisoner, and obliged to destroy the letter?"

"It is scarcely necessary to give it now," said the messenger with a smile, looking down at Nadia as she stood with the letter in her hand, and her face upturned to his, "but if the gracious lady wishes to assure herself

of my good faith, it was this: *Friday, in the Wolf's Glen.*"

Nadia breathed freely. The words told her what she wanted to know, the date, now three days hence, on which Caerleon was to inspect the garrison of Tatarjé, and the route by which he would travel. In the Wolf's Glen the O'Malachy would lie in wait, on murder bent, unless she could succeed in thwarting his purpose.

"Thank you," she said to the messenger. "I will give the letter to the Herr Oberst," and she watched him make his way along the branches of the tree until he was safely beyond the wall, and could drop to the ground. Then she went quietly indoors, intent on possessing herself, before the O'Malachy's return, of something she had noticed among her mother's belongings. It was a dagger about ten inches long, very bright and sharp, concealed ingeniously in a case shaped like a furled fan, and she had a vague idea that it might serve her as a means of defence on her way to Bellaviste, and perhaps stand her in good stead when there, if she found it necessary to frighten any one. It was alarming enough to her, at any rate, and she hoped earnestly that she might not be obliged to produce it at all, while the thought of using it against a living creature made her shudder; but she hid it carefully in her dress, and returned to the garden. Meeting her father when he entered, she gave him the letter.

"How did you get this?" he asked, looking at her suspiciously.

"A stranger gave it to me in the garden. He looked like a Thracian," she answered.

"You don't know um? Did he say anything?"

"He asked me to give it to you, and said that he was charged to deliver it only to you or me."

"Poor Louie!" said the O'Malachy, with apparent irrelevance. "Boys will get into scrapes now and then, and if he tries to find some way of writing to his old father without his colonel's finding ut out, why in the wide world wouldn't he?"

Understanding that she was intended to accept this transparent fiction as an explanation of the way in which the letter had been delivered, Nadia was silent, and her father retired to read it. When he returned, his manner was hurried and eager.

"This letter brings me marching orders," he said, and she noticed that he avoided meeting her eye. "Poor Louie's greatly troubled. He has got umself into a very bad scrape, and to settle his businuss I must start for Tatarjé by the morning train to-morrow."

"Oh, what has he been doing?" cried Nadia, in genuine terror. For the moment she really thought that, besides the expected intimation as to Caerleon's movements, the letter must have contained bad news of the kind indicated by her father.

The O'Malachy frowned. "It's not the kind of businuss we generally talk over with ladies," he said severely; and if Nadia's heart had not been so heavy, she could have laughed at the dignity of his manner as he administered this rebuke to her curiosity. All fear for Louis left her mind instantly, and she was ready to listen to her father when he resumed, after a moment's interval to allow the reproof to take effect, "I'll likely have to leave here by six in the morning to get to the station in time for me train. What to do about you I don't know. You must telegraph to Princess Soudaroff at once, but your train will not start from Boloszjen until mid-day to-morrow, and 't is not a right thing to leave you alone here."

"Oh, please don't trouble about me," said Nadia. "Why, there is not even a connection between Boloszjen and the Thracian railway, is there? No, if you will settle the hotel bill, and arrange for a carriage to take me to Boloszjen, I can start by myself quite comfortably." It would not have been human nature not to add, "You must think about Louis first, you know."

The O'Malachy lent a ready ear to the suggestion, which fitted in with his own wishes. It was evident that his preparations at Tatarjé were by no means complete as yet, probably owing to the uncertainty which had prevailed hitherto as to the exact date of the inspection, and his anxiety to be gone was great. Nadia packed for him the portion of his possessions which he would allow her to touch, and in the morning watched him drive away from the inn, bound for the starting-point of the Thracian railway, which had at last been completed as far as the capital. Now that he could no longer interfere with her, she must mature and carry out her own plans. In accordance with her father's injunction, she had telegraphed the evening before to Princess Soudaroff, asking whether she might come to her at Pavelsburg, but adding on her own account that she must pay a hurried visit to Bellaviste before starting for Scythia. Shortly after the O'Malachy's departure the answer arrived, assuring her of a warm welcome, and promising that the Princess would send a lady belonging to her household to meet her on the Scythian frontier if she would let her know when she expected to reach it. Nadia had been watching anxiously for this telegram—not that she was doubtful as to the welcome she would receive from the Princess, but because she could not well start on her

journey until the missive had arrived. As soon as she had read it she sought for the travelled waiter.

"I am obliged to change the Herr Oberst's plans for me," she said when she found him. "I shall not go to Boloszjen in the carriage, but I want you to have the luggage taken there and booked for Pavelsburg in my name. Then even if I am late for the train the boxes will not be lost. I am going to see little Ilona, the shepherd's daughter, and to take her some clothes. I shall not come back to Witska, but I believe it is possible to cross the mountains from the shepherd's hut and walk to the station beyond Boloszjen and catch the train there, is it not? Ilona's father will show me the way, so you need not be alarmed if you do not see me at Boloszjen."

The waiter and the landlord both showed great concern on hearing of the gracious young lady's determination to fatigue herself so much before starting on her journey, but she refused to yield to any of their suggestions, accepting only the offer of a boy to carry the parcel of clothes. Even this she would have declined if she had not feared that such persistent ungraciousness would excite suspicion, and she paid and dismissed her attendant as soon as the cottage came in sight. Her plans were already laid, and she walked on boldly, carrying in her arms the bundle, which contained the Thracian peasant-dress that Madame O'Malachy had worn on the fateful night of her accident. On entering the hut she was welcomed with a cry of delight by the sick child, whom she had nursed through a bad attack of bronchitis, and her mother; the father was away with his sheep. Nadia had no time to lose. She had picked up a sufficient knowledge of Thracian to make herself understood, and she plunged into her subject at once.

"I want you to let me change my dress here, Yerma," she said. "I have a friend in great danger at Bellaviste, and I must go to warn him." Glancing at the sympathetic faces of the mother and child, she knew that she was safe with them, and went on, "I thought I would wear clothes like yours, because I should attract less attention on the road. My own dress I will leave with you. You will be able to make a winter frock out of it for Ilona."

The delicacy of the shepherd's wife and daughter touched and surprised her, for they asked no questions and simply did their best to give her what help they could. Under Yerma's directions she put on the coarse linen gown and heavy sheepskin-lined pelisse which, in conjunction with high boots reaching to the knee, form the winter dress of the Thracian women. Then she knelt down by Ilona's bed, that the child might arrange on her head the coloured handkerchief which serves as bonnet and also as veil, and is pulled so far over the face that it is sometimes difficult to see from under it. Ilona called out in delight that no one would recognise the gracious lady now that she was dressed like this, and Yerma, after conjuring her to hide her hands in the long sleeves, agreed with the child. Gloves are never worn in Thracia by the poorer classes, the wide cuffs of the sleeves serving as a protection from the cold of winter. When her toilet was complete, Nadia stooped and kissed the child, and left the cottage with Yerma, who had volunteered to show her the path which led down to the lowlands on this side of the mountain. They spoke little as they ventured cautiously on the slippery descent; but when they had reached the road which led to the distant station, Yerma fell on her knees and kissed Nadia's hand.

"God and the saints bless you for all your kindness to my little Ilona!" she said. "We shall all pray for you, gracious lady, and for the gracious gentleman at Bellaviste, that you may be in time to warn him, and that you may both be happy."

"And only yesterday Carlino betrothed himself to the Princess Otilie!" was the thought in Nadia's mind, as she turned away with tears in her eyes from the grateful woman, and set out on her long lonely journey. It was fortunate for her that winter had as yet scarcely set in, and that the weather was unusually dry, for in an ordinary season it would have been impossible for a solitary woman to make her way along the road she was following. The cavernous ruts, into a few of which good-sized boulders had been pitched at haphazard, apparently with a view of filling up the holes, showed what the depth of the mud must be in wet weather; and Nadia fancied that perhaps the boulders had not been allowed to take up their present positions entirely by chance, as she had imagined at first, for pedestrians might find them extremely useful, and even necessary, as stepping-stones. She plodded on bravely over the uneven track, knowing that it must eventually lead her to the station, if she only followed it far enough; but it was so long that at times she was ready to sit down in despair, imagining that she had lost her way, for the narrow strip of rough stones and dry mud appeared unending. But she had not cultivated fortitude and endurance all her life for nothing. The temperament which had led her to practise martyrdom as a child was a potent aid to her now, and she toiled on, the remembrance of the mother and child in the shepherd's hut praying for the success of her mission giving her fresh courage. The few wayfarers she met looked at

her curiously as a stranger to the neighbourhood, but the fact that she had no luggage with her, and that she was able to answer their rough but kindly greetings in Thracian, seemed to forbid any shadow of suspicion, and they passed her as a woman making her way from one village to another. Still she pressed on, for the day was advancing, and the train which would reach Bellaviste at noon on the morrow started at four o'clock. An anxious fear seized upon her that after all she might not be in time, and goaded her to fresh efforts. With panting breath and stumbling feet she hurried along, and at last saw far in front of her the collection of wooden sheds which marked the starting-point of the Thracian railway system. Cheered by the sight, she almost lost her feeling of weariness during the last half-mile of the way, although, when the station was once reached and her ticket taken, she was glad to sink upon a bench and do nothing, think of nothing, but rest. When the train came in, she noticed its arrival mechanically, but it did not occur to her to take any active steps with regard to entering it, and had it not been for a warning from her neighbour on the bench, a pleasant-looking elderly woman laden with bundles, she would have been left behind.

Awakened by this friend in need to the fact that the train was just about to start, Nadia insisted on helping her to carry her bundles, and was glad to establish herself on the seat next to her in the carriage, which was constructed on the American pattern. They were the only women present, but the men gathered together at the other end and talked among themselves, and Nadia's friend arranged her parcels on the bench in front of her, and producing a covered brazier filled with hot charcoal, invited Nadia to put her feet upon it and

make herself comfortable. She was a cheerful, talkative person, and beguiled the way with quaint legends relating to the hills and valleys they were passing—legends which would have been full of interest for her hearer if she had not been so tired. Her long walk, the close atmosphere of the train, and the monotonous voice of her companion, all combined to make Nadia overpoweringly sleepy, but she succeeded in dissembling the fact until an irresistible nod brought her head into sudden and violent contact with the good woman's shoulder.

"Have you heard the story of the young prince and his witch-mother?" the narrator was saying. "There was a learned gentleman from Bellaviste travelling in our parts this summer, who heard me telling it to the children, and he was so pleased with it that he wrote it all down, every word. But you are tired, poor thing! Lie down here, and take this bundle of mine for a pillow, and I will cover you with my cloak. No, don't thank me. I have a daughter just your age. She is married, and lives at Bellaviste, and I am going to see her now for the first time since the wedding."

All the time she was talking she was busy arranging a comfortable place on the bench for Nadia, and then tucked her up in the most motherly way. The girl was deeply thankful to be allowed to rest, for mind and body were alike worn out. But the strain upon her was too great to permit of peaceful sleep, and she awoke at last with a start, shivering and trembling, to find her face wet with tears, and her friend laying a warning hand upon her shoulder. "I woke you because you began to scream," she said. "You have been crying all the time you were asleep, and talking in a language I don't understand, but I thought some

of the men there might hear you if you spoke loud, and know what you were saying."

"Thank you," said Nadia, sitting up and pushing back the hair from her face. "It was very kind of you to wake me, for I am in great trouble, and it might have done terrible harm if any one had understood what I said. I will tell you what I am doing here," she went on, moved to confidence as she looked into the motherly eyes opposite her. "There is a friend of mine in great danger at Bellaviste, and I have information which may save his life if I can only get there in time."

"But you are not a Thracian?"

"No, I come from the frontier, but my friend is in the Carlino regiment."

"Ah, he has been getting into trouble with his sergeant, I suppose? I know how it is: they always think the sergeant is hard upon them, until they become sergeants themselves, and then they can see no good in the men. My Elisaveta's husband is a sergeant in the city guard himself, and he has told me some fine tales! But your sweetheart—ah, we all know what 'friend' means—must have done something very foolish indeed to get himself into such trouble."

"If they kill him, it will be a shameful, horrible murder!" cried Nadia, hotly.

"Well, I suppose you have information to prove what you say. Are you going to appeal to the Minister for War?"

"Oh no, no! To the King."

"The King? Ah, that is wise, no doubt. He is young, and every one says he is kind-hearted, and he is going to be married, so that your sweetheart's case ought to touch his feelings."

"Yes," murmured Nadia, seeing at a glance the full irony of the situation.

"Yes, I think that on the whole you have come at a very favourable time. Have you written out your petition?"

"No, I never thought of that," said Nadia. "I meant to try and speak to him."

"But he might not catch sight of you, or he might have no time to listen. If he had a paper which would remind him of you, he might tell his brother, Prince Kyrillo,"—Nadia did not at first recognise Cyril under this designation,—"to inquire into the case afterwards. We must certainly get one drawn up. To-morrow morning the train stops for half an hour at a place where a cousin of mine lives. She is the station-master's wife, and she will be able to write for us. Or perhaps you can write? But it ought to be in French. Our King is learning Thracian, they say, but he certainly cannot know it well yet, and it would be a great advantage if he was able to read the petition at once."

"I can write French," said Nadia.

"Really? Ah, I thought you were better off than you seemed to be. I shouldn't wonder if you were a lady's-maid, now, in some noble family?"

"I belong to the household of a lady of high rank," said Nadia. Her friend looked at her doubtfully.

"I hope your sweetheart is good enough for you. I should say you might do better than a private soldier—even in the Carlinos. Don't you let yourself be led away by a handsome face and a fine uniform, my girl. An honest farmer with plenty of sheep and pigs, and a little money hidden behind a brick in the wall, would be likely to make you a far better husband, and you

wouldn't have all the trouble of moving about after the regiment, which is bad enough when you are a sergeant's wife, but is terrible when you have only a private's pay to depend upon. But there! young folks will choose as they like, and it's no use speaking to them."

"He is good enough to marry a princess," said Nadia, with tears in her eyes. "Please tell me about the petition. What shall I say in it?"

"Well, you oughtn't to tell everything, or he won't need to see you, and you want to be able to throw yourself at his feet, and melt his heart by your pleading. We must make up something slow and sad—like the stories." And to Nadia's astonishment, the practical business-like woman threw back her head, half-closed her eyes, and recited her improvised plaint in a kind of chant.

"**MOST ILLUSTRIOUS MAJESTY**,—Deign to permit a mourner to approach your royal throne.

"She comes not to cast a shadow upon your marriage joy, but to plead with you for the one she loves more than life.

"The beloved of her soul is doomed to death—death undeserved, death most cruel—and you alone can avert this fearful sorrow.

"Great is the power of the law, but greater is the word of the King.

"For you heaven has ordained happiness; do not, then, refuse to look upon those to whom bitterness and sorrow are appointed.

"Give to the suppliant who now appeals to you the joy of beholding the light of your countenance, that you may be assured that not only your mercy,

but your justice, will be satisfied if you grant her petition.

"That God may grant you a long and happy life with the royal lady to whom your troth is plighted, is the wish of all your subjects.

"But especially, whether you grant her entreaty or refuse it, will it be the prayer of her who is now kneeling before you."

"It is splendid!" said Nadia. "I should never have thought of such a way of putting it. It could not be better—except that I shall say 'this shameful murder,' instead of 'this fearful sorrow.' They say the King loves justice, and that will show him that a crime will be committed if he refuses to interfere."

"You are bold," said her friend. "But after all, no doubt the King will stand more from a girl than he would from an old woman, and he is an Englishman, and boldness may please him."

CHAPTER XVIII.

SO NEAR, AND YET—

THE long hours of evening and night wore away, so monotonously that Nadia began to feel as if a slow and uneven progress on a badly laid track, conducted to the accompaniment of the clanking of couplings and the dull thud of the engine, and diversified by halts of varying duration at unfinished and ill-lighted stations, was a normal condition of her life, and might be expected to last for ever. The men at the other end of the carriage made themselves comfortable upon the benches, and the two women slumbered intermittently among the bundles. Whenever she awoke Nadia busied herself in laying her plans for the morrow, as she sat gazing into the flying darkness, with an occasional glimpse of a distant star or a cloud of rushing steam. Her friend's insistence upon the necessity of a written petition had given her a new idea, but she did not intend to make use of it unless she was forced to do so by circumstances. It was still her intention to throw herself suddenly at Caerleon's feet and entreat him to listen to her for a moment. If, not perceiving who she was, he should depute Cyril to inquire into her case, all would be well; but if he should recognise

her, and she were compelled to deliver her warning to himself, she still cherished the wild hope that she would be able to retreat and lose herself in the crowd before he could recover from his astonishment. The petition was only to be used in case she found it difficult to obtain access to him. There was little likelihood of his recognising her handwriting, which he had only seen once or twice, but she hoped that the idea of a miscarriage of justice would rouse him at once to make inquiries, when Cyril would naturally be the messenger chosen.

In thus providing against various contingencies she passed the waking hours of the night, and in the morning, when the train stopped at the station where her friend's cousin lived, she felt that she was prepared for any event. The station-master's residence was not imposing in appearance, consisting as it did of four white-washed walls and a thatched roof, but the owner's wife received her visitors with much hospitality, insisted on their sharing her breakfast, and supplied them with the means of making a hasty and somewhat primitive toilet. During the meal Nadia's first friend unfolded the girl's story, in so far as she had heard it, to her cousin, and engaged her help in the matter of drawing up the petition. The hostess wasted no time in assuring them of her sympathy, but produced at once a pen and ink and some sheets of official paper from a hole under the thatch, which served apparently as her husband's bureau, and Nadia sat down to write at the small low table, from which the breakfast things had been hastily removed. It was no easy matter to translate into passable French the sonorous Thracian which her travelling companion poured forth, to the loudly expressed admiration of the station-master's wife, and

the latter complicated the matter almost at the beginning by exclaiming—

“Oh no, Maria! You must not mention the marriage, it would be most unsuitable. Haven’t you heard the news?”

“News? What news?” cried Nadia and her friend together.

“Why, about the poor King. The engine-driver on the train from Bellaviste which passed through the station this morning told my husband what he had heard them saying last night. The wicked girl—for wicked she is, princess or no princess—whom he was going to marry went and ran off with some one else on the very day before the betrothal!”

“I wish her husband joy of her!” said Nadia’s friend, grimly. “A jilt like that will come to no good. After all, the poor young King is well rid of such a minx. But I was afraid you were going to say that something had happened to the King—and I see you were too,” she went on, looking at Nadia, from whose hand the pen had fallen. “That would have been bad for you; for Milos Drakovics, good patriot though he is, is a man of iron, and would never listen to a girl’s entreaties, especially on a matter that touched the discipline of the army. Well, we must alter the words of the petition. Perhaps the poor King’s heart will be softened by his trouble.”

Awkward as the transposition of sentiment might appear, the Thracian poetess was equal to the occasion, and the petition was successfully drawn out, with its wording altered to correspond with the change of circumstances. After the first shock of surprise and ineffable relief, Nadia wrote steadily on, without allowing herself time to think. Not until she was again in the

train, with the farewells and good wishes of her kindly hostess ringing in her ears, did she permit herself to remember that Caerleon was once more free, that now there was no one who had the right to stand between him and herself. She knew that she ought to feel sorry that a scheme of so much excellence had failed, that such a cruel indignity had been put upon Caerleon in the face of all Europe, but she was not. She was silently, unspeakably glad, and all the morning as she sat listening patiently to her companion's legends, and putting in appropriate remarks at intervals, her thoughts were of the spring of happiness which was rising again in her heart.

"You look better this morning," the good woman observed complacently, as they neared Bellaviste. "No doubt it makes you feel more comfortable to have the written paper to depend upon in case you get flustered when you see his Majesty and can't say a word. That was how my Elisaveta felt when the War Minister's lady spoke to her one day at a military *fête*. Now be sure and let me hear how you get on. I wish you would come and eat some dinner with us, and let me take you afterwards to some place where you will be able to get a sight of his Majesty; but if you won't, you won't. Only, if you get into any trouble, ask for the quarters of Serge Georgevics, and even if I am gone home, you will find Elisaveta there, and she will help you in any way she can, for I am going to tell her all about you."

It was with difficulty that even on the platform at Bellaviste Nadia released herself from her kind friend, but when she had delivered the bundles she had been helping to carry into the charge of Sergeant Georgevics, who was waiting to meet his mother-in-law, and had

refused a second invitation to dinner, she found herself free. The sergeant told her that the King had already returned to the city, and was now receiving the Ministers at the palace, but that he would drive through the streets in the afternoon, that the townspeople might be gratified by a sight of him before he left the capital again for Tatarjé. There were, therefore, still two hours to spare before she could hope to see him, and she walked restlessly about the less frequented streets until she was tired, and then, fearing that she might be too exhausted to perform her task, went into a quiet restaurant for a cup of coffee and a roll. This frugal meal over, she made her way into the principal street, where she waited with all the patience she could command until the appearance of bodies of troops and police showed that the King might be expected to pass by before long. In spite of the failure of M. Drakovics to discover the nature of the plots hatched at Witska, he had learnt enough to make him anxious for the King's safety, and the road was to be lined on either side with mounted soldiers and gendarmes by way of precaution. Crowds of people gathered on the pavement as time went on, and the windows and house-tops were as closely packed with spectators as on the day when the King had first entered his capital. The Thracians were resolved not only to demonstrate their sympathy with their monarch under the somewhat trying circumstances of his return from the Mœsian frontier, but also to testify their appreciation of the diplomacy of his advisers. This might well be said to have succeeded, in spite of the untoward event which had occurred, in obtaining for Thracia peace with honour, and hence no patriot stayed at home who could possibly get out into the streets. Nadia succeeded in

maintaining a position in the front rank by dint of clinging to a lamp-post, and she peered anxiously between the soldiers in front of her to catch the first glimpse of the procession. At last the distant sound of mighty cheering arose, and as it came closer she caught sight of the glittering helmets and breastplates of the escort. Now she must act. Loosing her hold of the lamp-post, she slipped in between the horses of the two mounted men nearest her and tried to press to the front. But strict orders had been given to allow no one to pass the guards, and the man on her right caught her shoulder and turned her back.

"You can't go any further, my girl. If you want to see the King, stand still where you are, and you will get a splendid sight of him as he passes. You don't want to be introduced to him, do you?"

"I have a petition to present," she said eagerly, disregarding the man's rough humour. "I must give it into his hand."

"A petition? Let me see it."

Nadia gave it to him, and he scrutinised it carefully, upside-down, from the seal which the station-master's wife had insisted on adding at the foot, in the idea that it gave the document an official appearance, to the loyal address at the head, turned it over, smelt it, and handed it back to her. He could not even read sufficiently to know that it was not in Thracian, but he was satisfied that it was not calculated to convey any harm to the King.

"Yes, it's all right," he said. "You can throw it into the King's carriage as you stand there. Or, if you are afraid of missing, I will throw it for you, if you will thrust it into my hand just at the moment, so that the sergeant may not see."

"Oh no, I must give it to him," cried Nadia in a frenzy. The first carriage was close at hand now, and she saw that Caerleon was in it, sitting with his face to the horses, with Cyril and General Sertchaieff opposite him.

"But you can't," said the trooper, with a grim smile. What possessed her to do it Nadia could never afterwards determine, but she snatched out her dagger and struck at him wildly. He parried the blow with the greatest ease, knocked the dagger out of her hand, and seized both her wrists in an iron grasp, crying—

"Help! Here's a woman trying to murder the King!"

"Holy Peter!" cried another, as Nadia struggled in vain to free herself. "Look at her white hands. She is a Scythian spy!"

"A Scythian spy!" said another voice. "Kill her, then!" An officer of the escort had forced his horse into the group, about which the crowd was surging and shouting. Nadia became vaguely aware that the newcomer's face was familiar to her, that his eyes were like her mother's,—that he was her brother Louis. Madame O'Malachy's words recurred to her mind, "Louis will not allow you to spoil his plans," and as they did so, she saw that he had something in his hand. He raised it, and for one awful instant, which seemed an hour, she was looking down the barrel of a revolver. Her eyes were fixed on the little steel circle so close in front of them, but she saw Louis's finger moving to the trigger, and a shrill scream of terror broke from her as she cowered back and raised her elbow to shield herself. The crack she was expecting came, sounding to her like a thunder-clap, and the crowd yelled excitedly, but the bullet sped harmlessly over her head, as the weapon

was knocked up by the senior officer of the escort, who had caught her captor's agonised cry of "Accomplices, lieutenant! she may have accomplices!"

"You will return to the palace, Lieutenant O'Malachy, and consider yourself under arrest," said the captain, and Louis saluted, and backing his horse out of the crowd, rode away, followed by the cheers of the mob, which appeared to approve of his endeavour to execute lynch law. But Nadia did not even look after him. She had seen, over the heads of the pushing and struggling people, who had forced their way past the guards and into the road, Caerleon spring up in the carriage and call to the coachman to stop, had seen Cyril throw himself out before his brother could get his foot on the step.

"Your Majesty wishes me to settle this matter for you?" he said imperatively, refusing to allow Caerleon to descend.

"Good heavens, Cyril! don't you see that it's Nadia? I tell you I heard her voice. Let me pass!" But Cyril held his ground.

"Go on and leave me to settle things, unless you want to involve her and yourself in the biggest scandal that ever spread through Europe. It's for her sake, I tell you!"

"May I entreat his Majesty to continue his drive?" said an agitated commissary of police, thrusting his way to the front through the raging, roaring mass of people that had closed around the troopers and their prisoner. "The crowd are beginning to believe that the assassin has accomplished her purpose, and the woman will be torn in pieces before we can get her to the prison, unless the King will drive on and show himself, and so distract their attention from her."

"Do you want her blood on your head?" cried Cyril, pushing his brother back into his place. "Go on, and let me see after her. I promise you I will take no steps without your leave. Drive on," he called to the coachman.

Angry and bewildered, Caerleon found himself carried on, past the seething crowd into which Cyril was now forcing his way, and between fresh rows of anxious spectators who had not been able to leave their places, so closely were they packed together, and who were necessarily a prey to the wildest rumours. They greeted the King with tumultuous cheers; and as the news spread, those who were on the outskirts of the crowd, and found it impossible to obtain a view of him, rushed to the churches and began to ring the bells, so that the drive continued in a perfect pandemonium of sound. Caerleon, bowing mechanically to right and left, and wondering what could have brought Nadia to Bellaviste, and where Cyril would take her, could scarcely hear himself speak when he remembered that it would be suitable to make some remark to his companion on what had happened. He looked across at General Sertchaeff, but started when his eyes fell upon his face, for it was pale and set, and as expressionless as a mask.

"I am afraid this alarm has given you a shock, General?" he said, wondering whether it would be advisable to summon a doctor to prescribe for the Minister of War.

"Who would not be painfully affected by the attempt to perpetrate such a crime, sir?" returned General Sertchaeff. "Whom can we trust when Scythia turns our peasant-girls into assassins? I know these women: they will dare everything and tell nothing."

"I hope you will find you are mistaken," said Caer-

leon. "I myself am quite convinced that it was not an attempt at assassination at all."

Etiquette forbade General Sertchaieff to advance an opinion contrary to that of his sovereign, but he shook his head sadly, and it was evident that the people were sharers in his belief. Indeed, before Caerleon returned to the palace, it was commonly known in the city that the would-be assassin—a woman of extraordinary stature, and armed with three dynamite bombs, a dagger, and a couple of revolvers—had mounted the step of the carriage and dealt a stab at the King, which was only not fatal because the troopers had seized her and dragged her back just in time. In view of such a determined attempt at murder, it is not wonderful that the people thronged into the churches to return thanks for the King's escape, and that every loyal householder in Bellaviste devised and proceeded to execute marvellous impromptu illuminations for the evening with candles and oil-lamps. Cyril smiled grimly over the popular enthusiasm as he returned to the palace, and wondered impatiently how things were ever to be set right. Out of doors, the people were breathing out furious threats against the assassin; inside the palace Caerleon was waiting in restless anxiety for news of her.

"Well, where is she?" he asked eagerly, as Cyril came in.

"In the prison. We had to take her there to save her life,—the people were kicking up such a row," as Caerleon uttered an exclamation of horror; "but she is in the governor's house, treated as a guest; and the governor's wife, rather a jolly old lady, but as deaf as a post,—which is an advantage under the circumstances,—is looking after her like a mother."

"But what brought her here?"

"She came to warn you of a plot. So far as I can make out—for she won't mention any names—that good-for-nothing father of hers is intending to murder you to-morrow on the way to Tatarjé. Madame O'Malachy died the other day, and on her deathbed she let out the secret. Miss O'Malachy kept her own counsel, and started off here as soon as she could to give you the tip."

Caerleon drew a long breath. "Well," he said triumphantly, "I hope you see now that it is positively incumbent on me to marry her. Think of her coming all that way to warn me! She must care for me, after all."

"I was always under the impression that she did care for you, but refused you on conscientious grounds for the good of the kingdom," said Cyril.

"Oh yes, of course; but it's quite a different thing now. You must think me an utter cad if you imagine that I'm going to let her take this journey just to save me, and get herself into awful trouble with her own people, and then simply send her adrift again after it all. It's absolutely the only thing to be done."

"It's a most unfortunate affair altogether," said Cyril, meditatively. "If you ask me, Caerleon, I say that the only thing to be done is to get her out of the city to-night, and hush the matter up. Just wait a moment, and listen to me. You may not know—I didn't want to bother you at the time—that very nasty reports got into the Scythian papers a little while ago about you and her. The O'Malachys left Bellaviste hastily and in dudgeon, you see, and the old man takes it into his head suddenly to express a deadly hatred of you, and begins to talk big about the vengeance he will have for the way in which you have

treated his daughter. The girl makes no sign, but all at once, hearing of your engagement to Princess Ottolie (for she must have started before it was known to be at an end), she returns in disguise and attempts to murder you—that is how it will appear,—and all this will be simply nuts for the newspapers."

"This is awful!" groaned Caerleon, aghast. "You mean to say that I have let her in for vile suspicions of that kind?"

"I should have said that she had let you in for them. But it's my firm impression that she knows as little about this Scythian *canard* as you did a minute ago. If she had known, she is not fool enough to have used that dagger as she did."

"I don't quite see what you are driving at. That doesn't make any difference. Get out a special 'Gazette,' will you?—you're always issuing special 'Gazettes' for some reason or other—and tell the truth in it for once. Give her reason for coming here, and—no, I'll draw it up myself."

"Caerleon, stop!" cried Cyril, peremptorily, "and listen to me. You can't carry things off in this way. No one would believe your story, and it would be said that you had married her as the price of her silence."

"Stuff!" said Caerleon, contemptuously. "I shall ask the Queen of Moesia to invite her to Eusebia on a short visit, and that will put an end to these slanders. As for leaving her unprotected now, I tell you I won't hear of it."

"Do you mean to marry her against her will?" asked Cyril.

"No, I shall see her and make her understand the state of the case—not telling her anything of what you have said, of course. But I am sure I could have made

her listen to me before, only she begged me not to urge her against her conscience, and I obeyed her, like a fool! At any rate, I won't do that again. It would be absurd to talk about refusing me now for the sake of the kingdom,—after what has happened she must know that, for if I don't marry her I shan't marry at all,—and besides, when once the people hear why she came here to-day, they will be ready to worship her."

"Then I suppose there is no use in my giving you her message?" said Cyril.

"You may as well let me have it," said Caerleon, reluctantly.

"She impressed upon me that she would not consent to see you under any circumstances. She said she came here to try to do you a service, and found herself your prisoner. If you chose to force yourself upon her in defiance of her wishes, she must submit, since you were her gaoler, but she believed you were a gentleman, and would respect her desire for privacy."

"What is one to do with a girl like that?" groaned Caerleon. He would have liked to accuse Cyril of inventing the message, but it bore the impress of Nadia's somewhat impracticable style of heroism too plainly not to be genuine. "Still, she doesn't understand the case. I will put it to her that if she will marry me, she will be clearing me from imputations that have been made against me."

"If she doesn't understand the case then, she is not so clever as I think her," retorted Cyril; "and if you don't put it strong enough she won't listen to you for a moment. Now look here: she has a home promised her at Pavelsburg with Princess Soudaroff, her godmother, with whom she lived before, and she

only needs an escort to the Scythian frontier. The governor's wife would be quite willing to take the little trip at your expense, and I will accompany them as far as Boloszjen, where they will get the proper train. Then she will be all right, and we can hush the matter up without any scandal at all."

"And leave this wretched slander unrefuted?"

"Nonsense! the mere fact of the Princess's receiving her again into her house will refute it. Besides, I contradicted it at the time."

"I am extremely obliged to you for your solicitude about my affairs. Perhaps on another occasion you will remember that I also have some slight interest in them. Well, I will see her, and then decide."

"Of course, if you care to force yourself upon her after what she has said——"

"You will drive me wild, Cyril. I will write to her, then."

"No, you won't. At least, I am not going to carry any letter. You ought to know by this time that you should never put on paper anything that might prove compromising later on. I'll take any number of messages from you, if you like, and deliver them without note or comment."

"What do I care about being compromised? If you will tell me the most compromising form in which a letter can be written, I'll write it."

"I see. What I was afraid of was your compromising her."

"Oh, go and tell her what I want. You badger a man till he doesn't know whether he's standing on his head or his heels! But if you will make her understand that I beg and beseech and entreat her to marry me, and that I undertake that the people

shall receive her joyfully as queen, I'll forgive you—that is, if you bring back word that she says yes."

"Very well. I suppose I may give orders for a carriage and relays of horses to be ready to-morrow morning? Whether Miss O'Malachy decides to take the Trans-Continental express for Pavelsburg, or to go and stay at Eusebia preparatory to being transformed into the Queen of Thracia, we must get her out of the place before people are about. I'll take Wright to drive, if you can spare him. He couldn't tell tales here if he would."

"Oh, all right. But what on earth is the good of all this fuss? Tell her that if she will only have me, we will be married as soon as we can get a British chaplain up here."

"Do keep cool," entreated Cyril. "In any case, I thought that the lady always fixed the day?"

He left the room as Caerleon gave a despairing groan, and returned to the gaol for his second interview with Nadia. He found her sitting with the wife of the governor, a pleasant-looking, white-haired old lady whom deafness appeared to condemn to perpetual speech. Cyril could hear her monotonous voice rambling on as he came up the stairs, and it was not until he had written on a piece of paper that it was very important he should speak to Nadia Mikhailovna in private that she withdrew to the chimney-corner and comparative silence. Nadia had laid aside her peasant's dress, which had been torn almost to rags in the rough handling she had received from the crowd, and the old lady had lent her a black gown of her own, which was so much too large about the waist that it was necessary to keep it in place by a sash. This gave her a some-

what nun-like appearance, and she looked very tall and severe as she accompanied Cyril to the window.

"I suppose you have come to tell me what is to happen to me," she said, with extreme coldness, and yet before his entrance the irony of the situation had almost made her laugh. To have come all the way from Witska to save Caerleon, and to find herself accused of trying to murder him!

"I am here as the bearer of a message from my brother, which I have promised to deliver to you word for word," said Cyril. "If it had not been for your appeal to his good feeling, he would be here himself now; or he would have written, but I refused to carry a letter. He implores you to reconsider your former determination, and to consent to marry him. He undertakes that there shall be no opposition to the match among the people, and he will regard it as the proudest day of his life if you will be crowned with him next month as Queen of Thracia." He paused for a moment, then went on. "I am anxious to keep my word to Caerleon, and therefore I will tell you that no one could be more delighted than he was at the rupture of his engagement to Princess Ottile of Moesia."

"Ah!" said Nadia, her eyes shining for a moment, "and what do you advise me to do?"

"I don't presume to offer you any advice whatever. If my counsel was not in accordance with your wishes, I dare not hope that you would follow it, and if it agreed with them, it would be unnecessary. I am so anxious to leave you absolutely unfettered, that I will go so far as to say that I see no likelihood of my brother's taking the course which it seems to me would be most advantageous for the kingdom, and making another attempt to ally himself with a royal house. He appears

firm in his determination to allow no one to occupy your place in his heart. I congratulate you on your triumph."

"I hate you!" cried Nadia, with fierce irrelevance. "If anything could induce me to marry Carlino, it would be the thought that I was spoiling your plans by doing it."

Cyril shrugged his shoulders. "I hope that I should never forget myself so far as to behave otherwise than politely to the lady who had honoured my brother with her hand," he said.

"Oh no, there is no fear of that," said Nadia, wearily. "But do you think I don't know what would happen if I married him? Don't be afraid—I am not going to accept his offer. Your conduct would be unexceptionable, no doubt, but the things you would say—the hints you would give—the way you would look at me! Whenever trouble came upon Thracia, you would make me understand that you considered it was due to me. I cannot see how you and Carlino can be brothers. He is so—and you are——"

"We seem to be both easier to imagine than describe, at any rate," said Cyril. "I said I wouldn't offer you any advice, and I won't. If I were an orator like Drakovics, I might discourse to you on the beauty of self-sacrifice, the expediency of renouncing one's private wishes for the sake of the State, and other similarly appropriate themes. But being merely a man of the world, I can only say, marry Caerleon if you like, and become Queen of Thracia. No doubt you will be very happy until the next revolution comes. Or else leave him free still, and let him and the kingdom have a chance."

"I believe," said Nadia, slowly, "that you would pre-

fer that your brother had been killed rather than that he should be saved through me."

"Now you are becoming excited," said Cyril, "and when you think over the things you have said you will be sorry for them. Certainly I might wish that you had not chosen to warn him in such a noticeable—one might almost say theatrical—way. But that is a detail, a mere error of judgment, and does not really prejudice the fact, for which both he and I must always remain grateful to you."

"Thank you," said Nadia. "After receiving such a handsome acknowledgment of my services, it is only fair for me to give you the satisfaction of hearing that I refuse absolutely to marry the King, and that I will leave Bellaviste as soon as you will allow me."

"I can't pretend not to be relieved by your decision," remarked Cyril, frankly. "Pray be sure that I will do my best to settle the arrangements for your journey as much in accordance with your wishes as possible, although it will unfortunately be necessary to make the start very early in the morning, in order to avoid exciting attention. I propose, if you will allow me, to do myself the honour of accompanying you as far as Boloszjen——"

"Oh, why make all this fuss—this pretence of asking my permission?" asked Nadia, impatiently. "I know quite well that I am a prisoner, and must submit to whatever arrangements my gaolers may choose to make for me."

"Excuse me," said Cyril, "but I understood that you were leaving Thracia by your own choice, and going to rejoin your friends? I think you will see that this is both a more correct and a more agreeable way of looking at the matter. To return to our subject. The first

part of the journey we must make by road, for it would not be advisable for you to take the train from here. We will get on board at some country station, where no one is likely to recognise us. Our good friend Madame Bruics here will accompany you as far as the Scythian frontier, and give you into the charge of Princess Soudaroff's lady-in-waiting."

"I am most grateful to you for your kindness and consideration," said Nadia, rising to leave the room. "Perhaps you will tell Madame Bruics anything else you may have to say. I am very tired."

"If your gratitude is to be interpreted by your looks, it is not a kind I should care to get much of," said Cyril to himself as she retired. It took some time to explain in writing to Madame Bruics what was required of her and to meet her various objections, but at last Cyril was able to leave the prison and return to the palace. Sending for Wright to give him his orders for the morrow, he found the groom bursting with excitement and importance.

"'Ave you 'eard, my lord, as 'ow Mr O'Malachy 'ave sloped ?" he asked eagerly, as soon as the footman who had conducted him into Cyril's presence had departed.

"Sloped ? Lieutenant O'Malachy ?" cried Cyril, and cursed himself for a fool. Why had it not occurred to him to order Louis's arrest instantly on hearing Nadia's story ? He might have guessed that her father's plot needed a confederate in the city to enable him to carry it out successfully. "Is it certain that he is gone ?" he asked of Wright.

"Quite certain, my lord. The captin's in a orful way about it, been rowin' the sergeants shameful, and one on 'em tell me. The captin, 'e put Mr O'Malachy under arrest for shootin' at the young lady, and tell 'im

to come back 'ere. Contrairywise, 'e rides to the post-office, as bold as brass, and sends off a Government telegram to Mr Francis Xavier O'Reilly, at Tatarjé, orderin' 'im to leave the country within twenty-four hours. Then 'e rides out at the Feodoratz gate, sayin' as 'e's a-actin' aide-de-camp to 'is Majesty, and no one see 'im since. 'Is 'orse 'ave come back to 'is stable, but they say as Mr O'Malachy must 'ave 'ad a change of clothes 'id away ready somewheres, and 'ave got away like that, though why 'e should want to is beyond me."

But Louis's motive was not beyond Cyril's comprehension, for it was evident to him that, expecting that Nadia would involve him in her disclosures, he had seized the earliest opportunity for flight—a contingency against which he had carefully provided beforehand—and that he had, moreover, succeeded in warning his father to escape from Tatarjé at least an hour before Cyril had telegraphed thither to arrest him. The loquacious Wright found himself dismissed somewhat hastily, with instructions to have the carriage ready at six in the morning; and Cyril turned from the unpleasant contemplation of the oversight of which he had been guilty to drafting the announcement which was to appear on the morrow in a special 'Gazette,' in order to tranquillise the minds of the people. It was evident, he wrote, that a certain amount of misconception existed as to the incident of the day. The supposed attempt to murder the King was not, as had been imagined, the outcome of a plot, but it was hoped that in consequence of it the ramifications of a very extensive conspiracy would be laid bare. As for the young woman who had been arrested, she could not be held responsible for the intended crime, and having been found harmless, she had been restored to her friends. The last sentence

pleased Cyril extremely, both on account of its plausibility and its adherence to the truth, although he reminded himself as he read it over that he must keep the 'Gazette' out of Caerleon's way. His next duty was to write a full account of what had happened to M. Drakovics, who had remained on the frontier in order that he might meet the Premier of Moesia, and to tell him all that he had succeeded in extracting from Nadia on the subject of the plot. This was not much, for she knew very little, and declined to tell even the whole of that, but there was one point which seemed to Cyril to be of considerable importance. Who was the X. of whom Nadia had heard Madame O'Malachy speaking to her husband, saying that he had been induced by bribes to join in the conspiracy, and to bring with him all the men in his employment? After much cogitation, Cyril could only decide that he must be one of the large distillers whose trade had been spoiled by the temperance legislation of the present Government, and who would therefore be inclined to prefer a change in the state of affairs. He resolved to keep an eye on persons of this class in future, and he mentioned his conjecture to the Premier in order to see whether he agreed with him or not.

At the appointed hour the next morning, one of the royal carriages stopped before the door of the gaol, and Madame Bruics and Nadia came out and took their places inside. Cyril occupied the seat opposite them, acting, as Nadia felt, more as guard than as escort. Madame Bruics was fortunately sleepy and disinclined to talk, and they drove on in silence until they were about to pass the palace. With a sudden impulse Nadia bent forward and looked out of the window—to take a last look at the place which held Caerleon. But when they

came abreast of the small private gate, she started, for beside it there stood in the winter twilight a tall figure wrapped in a cloak. With a gasp Nadia realised that Caerleon was there,—that a word, a sign, would bring him to her, would end the long struggle in the way in which her heart ached for it to end.

"How did the beggar manage to find out when we were starting?" asked Cyril of himself with lively disgust, for the moment was a crucial one. He was equal to it, however. "You see him?" he whispered to Nadia. "You will give in now, I know."

She turned away from him impatiently, feeling even then a mingled shame and surprise that she could choose to wring Caerleon's heart rather than allow his brother to triumph over her. Her eyes met Caerleon's, and he stepped forward eagerly. For one moment she looked into his face, saw its expression of earnest entreaty change to one of disappointment, and read in it that her decision was accepted, as it was given, in silence. She waved her hand to him as he drew back, the carriage passed on, and he was left standing by the roadside. without a word said.

CHAPTER XIX.

PILGRIMS PERFORCE.

THE long journey on which Nadia's unflinching determination had embarked her was performed alternately by road and rail until Boloszjen was reached, but from that point it was possible to find a train running directly to Pavelsburg. At Boloszjen Cyril parted from the travellers, after seeing them safely into their carriage. Since leaving Bellaviste, Nadia had not exchanged a single word with him that was not absolutely necessary, for the hatred she had frankly avowed to him during their interview at the gaol had not been diminished by the taunt which had finally sealed Caerleon's fate, but now she put aside her dislike sufficiently to make an appeal to him on behalf of poor old Madame Bruics, who was to return alone from the Scythian frontier. Precluded by her deafness from receiving either advice or warning, unless these were tendered in writing, the old lady would be quite helpless if left to herself, and Nadia told Cyril that it was his duty to send Wright to escort her and bring her home. Such plain speaking was rather a bitter pill for Cyril, who was wont to pride himself on his foresight and tactful consideration, and felt that in this case especially he had done more

than any one could have expected of him ; but he recognised the cruelty involved in sending poor Madame Bruics upon a wild - goose chase over the railways of Central Europe, and put the crowning touch to his self-abnegation by depriving Caerleon of Wright's services for some days longer. He parted from Nadia in a polite and hostile manner—that is to say, she did not offer to shake hands with him, and he went away marvelling at the uncharitableness of some people.

Wright as an escort was much more to Nadia's taste than his master had been, although he considered it his duty to come to the window of the carriage at every station and inquire whether the ladies would like some tea—for tea, in his opinion, was the only refreshment acceptable to the feminine mind, and as such, was capable of being imbibed at all hours and at very short intervals. When they reached the Scythian frontier, and Nadia, to her great joy, had discovered Marie Karlovna, a German lady belonging to her godmother's household, waiting to meet her, she commended Madame Bruics to Wright's care with great earnestness, although he viewed her solicitude as impassively as he did the coin which she ventured to slip into his hand, and at which he glanced immediately in order to ascertain its value. But when she had seen Madame Bruics established in the return train, and was turning away with Marie Karlovna, she heard footsteps behind her, and looking round, found Wright close at hand.

" Beg your pardon, ma'am," he said, in a low voice and with great embarrassment, " but don't you go for to take on about the King. 'E always rides straight, 'e do—not like some people as ought to know better and doesn't ; and 'e knows 'is own mind, and as some poetry chap says, 'Is 'eart is always true.' "

For a moment after the utterance of this sentiment, the presumptuous groom felt ready to sink into the earth under the combined weight of his own daring and the glance which Nadia turned on him, but while he was wondering apprehensively whether she would give him in charge on the spot or write to Lord Cyril to complain of his conduct, the fire died out of her eyes, and she said gently—

"Thank you, Wright. I know quite well that what you say of the King is true. He is the best of men, and nothing of all that has happened is his fault."

Wright touched his hat and retired, red in the face but with a clear conscience, deciding in his honest mind that Miss O'Malachy would make a sight better wife for 'is Majesty than that there princess would 'ave done, and that he 'oped he might one day 'ave the honour of trainin' a 'orse for 'er to ride. And Nadia looked after his short sturdy figure with something like affection, not unmixed with envy, for he loved Caerleon, and he was going back to him now. She was leaving him farther and farther behind as she travelled on to Pavelsburg with Marie Karlovna, who had evidently received strict orders not to tease her with questions, for she talked exclusively of the great conference of members of different evangelical denominations which had recently been held in the city, and of other matters interesting to the supporters of the Cercle Evangélique. At last the capital was reached, and Nadia saw awaiting her on the platform a tall stout elderly lady, carelessly dressed, with her abundant grey hair surmounted by a ludicrously unfashionable bonnet. If these personal characteristics had not been sufficient of themselves to identify Princess Soudaroff, other evidence would have been furnished by the almost adoring

reverence with which she was surrounded by the minor officials of the railway, among whom she had worked for years. But Nadia needed no such additional help. She could scarcely wait for the door of the carriage to be opened, but precipitated herself down the steps and into her godmother's arms.

"Oh, Marraine, I have so longed to see you!" she cried.

"Not more than I to see you, dear child," returned the Princess, patting Nadia's shoulder affectionately. "You have been out into the world since we parted. How has it used you?"

"Oh, I have so much to tell you, to ask you," said Nadia, with a sigh that was almost a sob, but her godmother stilled her eagerness with a gesture.

"When we reach home, my child—not now. Come, we attract attention. My good Marie, I am rejoiced to see you. You are ready? The carriage is waiting."

"They have not been taking care of you while I have been away, Marraine," said Nadia, when she was seated in the carriage by the Princess's side. "You want me to choose your dresses and bonnets for you again."

"Very well, my child," smiled her godmother. "Marie Karlovna has looked after my clothes since you went to join your parents, and she said that it was no use getting expensive things for me, because I always gave them away." Marie Karlovna made a deprecating gesture of assent, and Nadia smiled, remembering that she had seen the Princess take a sable-lined cloak from her own shoulders and give it to a beggar-woman. "But this bonnet," Princess Soudaroff went on, "I chose for myself, and I think you must like it, dear child. I saw Olga Ivanovna, the Bible-woman, wearing one, and it pleased me so much that I asked her to

have one made for me exactly like it. And she did, and this is the bonnet."

"Oh, Marraine, I shan't rest until I have taken you out shopping, and made you get some fresh clothes," said Nadia, laughing; and then it suddenly struck her what a mockery it was to come back and take up her old duties as if she had scarcely been away a week, after the scenes through which she had passed in the interval. The tears rose into her eyes again, and her godmother laid a sympathising hand upon her arm.

"Have patience, my child; you shall tell me everything as soon as we reach home," and Nadia dried her eyes resolutely, and tried to assume an interest in the changes that had taken place during her absence in the streets through which they were passing. When they arrived at the large house of which the Princess occupied a part, she had regained her calmness sufficiently to be able to reply with a smile and a kind word to the greetings of the servants who crowded to welcome her, and who formed a motley group, owing to the Princess's fondness for taking her friends' failures into her household and giving them another trial.

"I see that the house is as full as ever," said Nadia, as her godmother led her up the stairs, after bestowing upon her a kiss of welcome at the door.

"Yes, you will find many old friends, although some have succeeded in obtaining other situations. Ah, do you remember my maid Katinka, the pretty girl who married the handsome young carpenter on my country estate? He has deserted her most cruelly, poor thing! and she came to me almost in despair. I could not take her back as maid, for I am trying to train little Vera, a *protégée*, as you may remember my telling you,

of Countess Wratisloff's. She was serving in a little shop, amid very undesirable surroundings, and she was not a success as Countess Wratisloff's kitchen - maid, so I offered to take her. It was a little trying at first, but she has done better lately. Of course I cannot turn her out and give Katinka her place, so Katinka is sempstress now, and I can scarcely find her work enough to do."

While she was speaking, the Princess was leading Nadia through the rooms which had always been hers, and she now pointed out the little changes and improvements she had made in view of the girl's return.

"How good you are to me, Marraine!" said Nadia, gratefully.

"Would you have me cruel to you, my poor child? Now, come," and she sat down in the arm-chair—"come and tell me all about your troubles."

"Oh, Marraine!" cried Nadia, throwing herself on the ground and burying her face in her godmother's dress, "I have given up everything because it was right to do it, and I cannot even learn to forgive!"

"Not *even* forgive? But that is often the hardest thing of all to do. Tell me about it, my child," repeated the Princess, and Nadia poured forth the story of her first meeting with Caerleon, of his kindness to her, and of the way in which each had learnt to love the other; then his sudden acceptance of the kingdom, with all the changes it had brought in its train; his repeated appeal to her to share his throne, the intrigues by means of which Scythia had sought to gain ascendancy over him through her, her journey to Bellaviste to warn him of the plot against his life, and her resolute but ignominious departure.

"I gave him up because it was right to do it, Mar-

raine," she said; "and not only am I miserable myself, but I have made him miserable."

"Was it right?" asked the Princess, quietly.

"Oh yes, Marraine, of course,—at least I knew it must be right because it was so hard to do."

"Is that the way in which you test your duties, my child? It is a wise plan in many cases, but sometimes dangerous—for instance, if you begin to regard 'difficult' as synonymous with 'right.' You are told to 'endure hardness as a good soldier,' but never to follow hardness as an aim in itself. It is Christ you are to follow. What would you think of a soldier who chose to live out in the snow rather than in the barracks provided for him? Would he make himself a better soldier by ruining his health and risking his life in such a way?"

"No, but——" the idea was too novel for Nadia to grasp it at once in its entirety.

"And think what it is that you have been accepting as right," the Princess went on, with sudden passion. "You tell the man who has assured you that he loves you alone in the world that if he desires to please you he must marry another woman. This may be self-sacrifice, my child, but it is certainly sin."

"But the kingdom—the people——" gasped Nadia, confounded.

"Was the King to sin for the sake of his kingdom? Could you not have parted from him for a time, if it was necessary, each assured of the other's love, and content to wait—all your lives, perhaps—in case a way might possibly be opened for you? It may be that in taking your own path you have missed the training God meant for you."

"But the uncertainty would have been so dread-

ful. Surely it was better to end it at once," urged Nadia.

"Better? to you, perhaps. But what of this poor Carlino? Had you no misgivings, my child?"

"None at all, at first. When Carlino told me at Witska that he had accepted the crown, I had been wondering just before whether I had done right in urging him to take it, and while he was speaking I saw quite suddenly what I must do. Since I had goaded him into becoming king—I really did, Marraine; I said dreadful things to him—this was my punishment, that the kingdom should come between him and me. There was no question about my duty."

"But why punish the poor Carlino?" asked the Princess.

"I don't know, Marraine—because I could not do my duty without punishing him, I suppose. I am afraid I didn't think of that—I was so unhappy, and yet I never doubted that I was right. And then, when Lord Cyril came to speak to me about it, it was just the same. He seemed not to have a doubt as to my refusing Carlino, but took it for granted both that I ought to do it and that I should."

"And you felt unwilling to disappoint Lord Cyril?" said the Princess, with a sarcasm that came oddly from her gentle lips. "Your parents, also, would have been disappointed, no doubt, if you had become Queen of Thracia?"

"Oh no," returned Nadia in surprise. "They wished it above all things."

"And you felt that anything that they desired was on that account alone to be regarded with suspicion? I know that you are inclined to be always in opposition, my child. To us of the older generation, dissent

is a sorrowful necessity; to you young reformers it is the breath of life. You feel happier when you have found something with which you can disagree."

Nadia digested this unpalatable remark with what patience she might. "Carlino has hinted something of the same kind to me," she said, "but I did not know that I was quite so bad as that."

"You have never doubted the wisdom of your action, then?"

"Oh yes, often, when we were at Witska the second time. The doubts used to torment me. And then came the offer which was brought by Vladimir Alexandrovitch. You would not have had me accept that, Marraine?"

"And enslave your husband's kingdom? God forbid, my child. But you have received a message from Carlino himself, since that time, have you not?"

"Yes, but—— It was Lord Cyril again, Marraine. I forgot all my doubts when he put things before me."

"Then it was only necessary for him to take it for granted again that you would refuse his brother, and you did?"

"Oh no, Marraine; you do not know Lord Cyril at all. This time he took it for granted that I should give way and marry Carlino, and I could not resist proving him a false prophet."

"You care much less, then, for the happiness of Carlino than for the opinion of his brother, since you prefer to disappoint your lover rather than hear Lord Cyril say, 'I have prophesied it'?"

"No, indeed, I have no respect for Lord Cyril's opinion; but it is the things he says—he has a power over me."

"You do not love Carlino sufficiently to disregard Lord Cyril's sneers?"

"Marraine! I love him well enough to give him up."

"Yes; but you are afraid to marry him lest his brother should taunt you if anything went wrong. If you loved him better, my child, you would have no cause to fear Lord Cyril, for his words would have no effect upon you."

"Then it is my own fault, after all?" said Nadia, hopelessly. "Marraine, it seems to me that I am continually discovering things too late. Now that my mother is dead, I see that we might have been much more to one another, and now that Carlino will never approach me again, I find that it was I myself, and not Lord Cyril, whom I have been blaming in my mind, that kept us apart. I am always wrong. But you will help me; you will show me what I ought to do."

"But I am not sure that I should be right in keeping you with me here," said the Princess. "You have come home at a sad time, dear child. We Evangelicals are suspected by all the world just now, and the spies of the Holy Synod are watching us."

"But suspected, Marraine? How should we be suspected, when we pray always for the Emperor and for Scythia, and counsel patient submission even to unjust laws?"

"Alas, my child! why did the wolf suspect the lamb? Marie Karlovna will have told you of our late conference, and of the blessing and support which resulted from it to many among the brethren. But such a gathering from all parts of the empire attracted the notice of the police, and they made a raid on the hotel in which some of the brethren, who could not

all be accommodated in the houses of the faithful here, were staying. Strange to say, there was a band of Oudenist conspirators lodging in the same house, and on being apprised of the approach of the police they fled, leaving a secret printing-press and a quantity of seditious literature concealed in one of our friends' rooms. Happily, our brothers were able, after some weeks' imprisonment, to convince the tribunal of their innocence, but M. Tourquemadischoff and the Holy Synod considered that the object for which they had come together was scarcely to be preferred to Oudenism. All the churches which had taken part in the conference were censured, and ordered to keep their members at home for the future, and all our free evangelistic services are forbidden. We are daily expecting to hear that Anton Gregorievitch is exiled."

"Oh, Marraine, Count Wratisloff! But what has he done, and what shall we do without him?"

"God removes His labourers, and continues His work," quoted the Princess. "The pillar of our faith and our work is the living God, not Anton Gregorievitch. You ask what he has done. He has denounced wars of aggression and religious persecutions, he has prayed in public that the Emperor might be granted judicious advisers, and he has devoted his fortune to helping the poor and needy."

"But what is he doing now?" asked Nadia. "How does he endure the suspense?"

"He goes on with his work, one day at a time. The great evangelistic services held at his house have come to an end, but his Bible-readings, his visiting of the sick, both at their homes and in the hospitals, his efforts to raise the condition of the peasantry, he will not cease."

"Nor have you ceased yours, Marraine, I am sure."

"Ah, we women are not in such imminent danger, my child. But still, I do not like to involve you in any risk. Would you care to go and stay in the South with my sister? or I have friends in England who would be delighted to receive you?"

"Are you suggesting that I should leave you? Never, Marraine! Let me stay and help you as much as I can. I am not good enough for the Bible-readings and the visiting of the hospitals, but I can be some use to you with your accounts, and the soup-kitchen, and the sewing-class."

"You shall, my child; and God grant that you may be blessed and be a blessing in your life here."

The very next day Nadia slipped into her old place in the household, and began her chosen work, much to the relief of the Princess, who had, as she was wont to lament, no head for accounts, and found it very pleasant to be released from the consideration of the innumerable business details connected with all her charitable institutions. To the girl herself, also, it was a delight to be able to plunge into work once more, and she was glad to be kept busy almost all day long, getting in supplies for the girls' boarding-house, checking the sales at the Bible-depot, and arranging for the despatch of necessary stores to the hospital on her godmother's country estate. But wherever she went, she was always conscious of the presence and scrutiny of various watchful, ostentatiously quiet-looking men, who were invariably to be seen lounging in the neighbourhood of the different institutions. The Princess's warning had given her the clue to their appearance there. They were the spies of M. Tourquemadischeff, the Procurator of the Holy Synod.

Things went on quietly, however, until the evening of the second Sunday after her arrival in Pavelsburg, when Nadia accompanied her godmother and several other members of the household to Count Wratisloff's house for a Bible-reading. There were only about twenty persons present, for although many more would have been glad to attend, the number of the invitations had been restricted, in order to give the police no pretext for interference. The Count had been one of Nadia's heroes for years, and she embraced eagerly the opportunity of hearing him once again, for what might, as she now learned, be the last time. The address partook of the character of a farewell, and the speaker prefaced it by remarking that it had been intimated to him by a high authority that he might remain in Scythia unmolested if he would consent to discontinue his evangelistic work, but that if he persisted in carrying it on, however quietly, his exile would follow. The holding of this meeting was his answer to the offer, and he seized the occasion to make a last solemn appeal to those who heard him. Their leaders might be exiled, he said, their assemblies prohibited, but their faith did not depend on either the one or the other. Lands and wealth might be taken from them, but they could live, as some of their brethren already did from choice, like the poor, and share with them what they gained by the labour of their hands. They might be deported to distant parts of the empire, might be sent even to Hyperborea, the dismal region of almost perpetual night; but, if so, it was because there was work for them to do there, even though it were only the exhibition of a contented spirit under hardships, and God could make even Hyperborean darkness to be light. Let them feel assured

that for every earthly good of which they were deprived, there was a greater blessing waiting to reach them, which could not do so unless the way were prepared for it by the removal of the worldly delight. Was there, then, any reason for condemning the rulers of the empire, or even the authorities of the Church which they had quitted with so much sorrow and reluctance, but which branded them as heretics? None; they were only instruments in the hand of God, and could do nothing without Him. And, therefore, no resentment must be felt towards them, for all that happened would prove to be for the best. And even when the cloud was darkest, and no silver lining was visible, were the sufferers never themselves to blame? Had they never injured any one without offering redress, never refused haughtily a proffered reconciliation, never alienated by their unsympathetic demeanour those who would fain have been friendly? If they had, and there were few who could say they had not, let them bear their punishment meekly, accepting it as less than they deserved, and asking that even out of the sad consequences of their own faults and failings good might arise to the people of God.

The coincidence between the burden of Count Wratisloff's address and the words which had fallen from the Princess on the night of her arrival struck Nadia forcibly, in spite of the difference in the circumstances to which they applied, but the similarity did not altogether please her. It was hard to acknowledge to herself that her heroic conduct in refusing Caerleon had been wrong from the outset and based upon a mistake, harder still to confess that Cyril would have been powerless for harm if she had not given him a hold

upon her by being willing to accept his arguments as true ones. She was silent enough during the farewells and the drive home, but when they had arrived at the Princess's house she hesitated to face the solitude of her own room, and lingered with Marie Karlovna, echoing her voluble lamentations over the approaching loss of Count Wratisloff. Leaving her at last, and passing along the passage, she heard sobs proceeding from a room on her left, and looking in, found the sempstress Katinka crying as though her heart would break.

"What is the matter, Katinka? Can I do anything for you?" she asked, gently.

"No, thank you, Nadia Mikhailovna," sobbed the girl. "No one can help me, for the trouble is in myself. I have an enemy whom I cannot forgive."

Nadia started, surprised to find a story so like her own. "Tell me about it," she said, sitting down beside Katinka.

"It is Anna, my husband's sister," responded the maid, brokenly. "I was so happy with my Yegor, he was so kind to me; and Pauline Vassilievna had promised to have a cottage built for us close to her own country-house, so that I might be near her still. But Anna always hated me, because I came from the town, and she was jealous because Yegor was so fond of me, and because of the new house. She never showed her enmity to me—if she had I could have guarded against it—but she made up lies about me, and told them to Yegor. He was passionate, and I was proud. I told him that if he could listen to such things about me it was enough to show that he did not love me in the least. He told me to deny them, and I would not. He went to her for advice, and she told him even worse tales, and then he left me without another word, and I have

never seen him since. And now Anton Gregorievitch says that I must forgive Anna, though she has ruined my home and taken away my husband and spoilt my whole life. And I cannot do it."

"I am like you, Katinka," said Nadia. "I also have an enemy whom I cannot forgive. He spoils even my prayers."

"But you are a great lady, Nadia Mikhailovna," said Katinka, in surprise. "Who can have injured you?"

"He could not have injured me if I had not allowed him—helped him to do it," said Nadia. "That is why I can't forgive him, Katinka."

"But that is like me," said Katinka. "If I had not been too proud to explain, Yegor would have believed me at once, I am sure. Have we both helped our enemies by doing wrong ourselves?"

"I believe we have," said Nadia, and both girls sat silent for a while, Nadia in her velvet and furs beside the sempstress in her peasant dress. At last Katinka looked up.

"I have been thinking," she said. "After all, Anna was fond of Yegor; she had brought him up, and kept house for him until we were married. Perhaps I was not as kind to her as I might have been, and a great deal of the trouble was my own fault—and I want to be forgiven myself Nadia Mikhailovna——"

"And so do I," said Nadia, softly.

"Somehow," said Katinka, "looking at it in this way, I seem to have been worse than I thought, and Anna not so bad. It is not so hard to forgive—I will, I can forgive her."

"I will forgive him; I do," said Nadia.

"Marraine," said Nadia the next morning, "I

know why you took me to Count Wratisloff's last night."

"I hoped you might hear something to help you, my child," the Princess answered. "Is your difficulty gone?"

"If I saw Lord Cyril now," said Nadia, slowly, little thinking that it would not be long before she had an opportunity of proving the truth of her words, "ill or in any trouble, I should feel so sorry for him that I would nurse him, or do anything I could to help him. And yesterday I am afraid I should have been glad."

"And you are happier now, my child?"

"So happy, Marraine, that I want you to find me some other work to do,—a class of little girls, perhaps, to teach. I don't want to keep my happiness to myself. I can never feel really hopeless or miserable again."

"Take care, dear child," said the Princess; then, her thoughts reverting to the Scythian translation of the 'Pilgrim's Progress' which she was reading, she went on, "Christian's path to the Celestial City was not all smooth, even after he had lost his burden. There was the Hill Difficulty, and the fight with Apollyon, and Vanity Fair, and Doubting Castle. And there is always oneself to fight against."

Although Nadia, in her eagerness, was scarcely willing to listen to a forecast that seemed to her so gloomy, there came very soon to the Cercle Evangélique a loss such as that which parted Christian from Faithful. The first intimation of it reached Princess Soudaroff's household on the Thursday morning, when, as the ladies were at breakfast, they heard a voice inquiring for Pauline Vassilievna, and shortly afterwards the servant announced Vladimir Alexandrovitch, and ushered in Prince Soudaroff.

"Pray don't let me disturb you, ladies," he said to Nadia and Marie Karlovna, who had risen at his entrance, after a general greeting. "My business is not private. I come merely to bring my sister-in-law a piece of news. Anton Gregorievitch is exiled."

"Hyperborea?" gasped the three ladies at once.

"No, merely exiled from the empire. I suppose this will make a good deal of difference to you?"

"If God means His work to go on, He will supply the labourers," said the Princess.

"But will it make no change in your plans?"

"I think not. Why should it?" The Princess was on good terms with her brother-in-law, although they differed in their religious views. Some years before, when her own family, fearing that she would bestow the whole of her property in charity, had applied that it should be placed under legal guardianship, he had been appointed her trustee, and had dealt out her money to her ever since faithfully, if with a good deal of mockery. Hence she was grateful to him for continuing to supply her with an unfailing store of cash for distribution to those in need, whereas if left to her own guardianship she would have deprived herself in a single year of all power to give.

"Oh, there is no reason whatever," he answered lightly. "I am afraid that this will not be the last of the banishments, that is all. But we all know that ladies will have their way, though empires fall. I only wish you good people could manage to keep out of the clutches of the Holy Synod. You ought to know by this time that we are determined to drive out all our most industrious subjects because they are Jews, and exile all our best because they are heretics. We mean

to be orthodox if we can't be either prosperous or pious. Adieu, my sister."

He was gone, and the three ladies gathered round the table again to discuss the situation.

"We shall be obliged to make new arrangements for some of the work to-morrow," said the Princess. "I fear that we cannot carry on all Count and Countess Wratisloff's classes to-day, but we will not let them drop if we can help it. I will do my best to prepare an address for the Count's navvy Bible-class this evening. The police will have prevented him from finding any one to take his place. Then there is the Countess's Bible-reading at the house of blind Dmitri Nicolaievitch. We must think of some one for that."

"I will try, if you like, Marraine," said Nadia, timidly. "If I find that I am too nervous, blind Dmitri will read, I know, and at any rate I can tell the people what has happened to Anton Gregorievitch."

"Very well, my child. The carriage shall take you on after leaving me at the Mission-room, and I will call for you afterwards."

In pursuance of this arrangement, Nadia found herself that evening a member of the little gathering of poor people who met in the blind man's room to hear the Bible read and explained by Countess Wratisloff, and of whom the host was the only one that could read. None of them had heard of the fate which had befallen the Count and Countess, and several burst into loud lamentations when Nadia told her story. But above the tumult the voice of blind Dmitri was heard.

"Let us lay before God the case of our father, who has been taken from us, brothers, and of the work which he must leave undone."

They knelt down, and Dmitri prayed long and earnestly. Before he had come to the end of his prayer, the cottage door opened. The blind man heard the sound, but took no notice, thinking that one of the members of the class had come in late; but Nadia, glancing up involuntarily, saw the glint of uniform-buttons in the lamplight. She recognised the state of affairs at once. M. Tourquemadischeff had sent a body of police to break up the meeting. That they remained silent so long was due to the unconsciousness of the blind man, who continued his prayer without perceiving their presence. The moment that he had finished, an officer stepped forward and arrested Nadia in the Emperor's name. Another was taking down the names and addresses of those who were present, and their men were searching the cottage for forbidden books, one carrying off the huge volumes of the Bible in Moon's type which Princess Soudaroff had provided for Dmitri. This done, her captors ordered Nadia to accompany them; and she obeyed as though in a dream, while the poor people pressed round her weeping, and trying to kiss her hands or the hem of her dress. Outside the cottage was waiting a covered sledge which she was desired to enter, the two officials following. After a drive which lasted for some time the sledge stopped, and she was conducted into a small stuffy room, in which two officers were sitting writing. They looked up with some surprise on seeing her, but proceeded to ask her name, age, abode, religious views, and also what she was doing in Dmitri's house. They made no attempt to entrap her into any admissions, for it was evident that this was a strictly preliminary inquiry; but when it was over she found herself relegated to a bare stone cell for the night. This hard reality brought home to her the nature of her

position. The way she was treading led to Caucasia or Hyperborea, to separation from friends, to association with the vilest criminals, the stigma of a felon. But in her exalted state of mind the thought did not trouble her, and she preferred to dwell on the remembrance of Dmitri's prayer. "I will trust and not be afraid," were the words with which he had concluded; and with these on her lips she lay down upon the rough bench without undressing and fell asleep.

"Nadia, my dear child!" were the words that awakened her in the morning. "Forgive me. I was warned yesterday afternoon that a raid was intended, but I thought it would be the navvies' class which they would attack, and I never dreamt of their arresting you. My child, I have been driving about all night from police-station to police-station, and from Minister to Minister, first to find you and then to release you. I went first of all to Vladimir Alexandrovitch, and he accompanied me everywhere. He said that it would never do to allow you to be sent to Hyperborea, for we should have King Carline invading Scythia with an Anglo-Thracian army to release you. Of course that was only his jest; but we left no stone unturned to set you free. I threatened to force my way into the Emperor's presence, and lay the matter before him; I threatened to put it into the hands of the British Embassy—although I really don't know whether you are a British subject or not—Vladimir Alexandrovitch says that you certainly are not; I threatened to stir up English public opinion through the Evangelical Alliance. At last I succeeded in obtaining an order for your release, and for myself—this."

Nadia took the paper she held out. It was an official permission for Pauline Vassilievna Soudarova to travel

outside the Scythian dominions, until the Emperor should revoke the leave thus granted.

"Oh, Marraine!" cried Nadia, sadly, "and this is all through me. Exile!"

"Oh no, dear child. It is merely permissive, you see. Now, what shall we do? Shall we accept the permission, and place Dr Schmidt and Marie Karlovna in charge of all our work, leaving the house as it is, and directing operations by letter? Or shall we disregard it, and wait until we are arrested, and conducted to the frontier by the police, while the institutions are all closed, and our poor people sent to Caucasia? I want your opinion."

"I don't like beating a retreat, Marraine," said Nadia, frankly, "but if we can ensure the continuance of the work better by leaving at once, perhaps we ought to go."

"That was just what I thought," said the Princess. "Now, my child, I have a scheme. I wish to follow in the footsteps of St Paul."

"A pilgrimage, Marraine?" asked Nadia.

"Not quite. A friend of mine has a yacht, which is lying at Cadiz, and which he is anxious to let for the winter, and I am thinking of hiring it. I have visited the Holy Land already, but I should like to see Malta and Asia Minor and the Ægean. It would be most interesting; and, from the Bosphorus, one might even visit the Black Sea, and perhaps meet some—some old friends. I have a strong conviction that we are not driven out of Scythia in this way for nothing—without some good purpose."

"Yes, Marraine," said Nadia, sedately, as the Princess ended her sentence rather hastily; but in her heart she knew that her godmother was anxious to

see whether there was no possibility of bringing her and Caerleon together again. Her heart leaped at the thought, but calmer considerations succeeded to the momentary ecstasy. Was it likely that Caerleon would be willing to put his fate again to the touch after two refusals? It was scarcely probable.

CHAPTER XX.

TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

AT the Thracian capital preparations were now being made a second time for the King's coronation. The outer walls of the chapel of St Peter had risen from their ashes in the courtyard of the palace, and the decoration of the interior was almost complete; while the crown and other regalia had been subjected to a process of renovation, and were ready for service, though somewhat shorn of their original splendour. Many circumstances seemed to combine to enable the ceremony to take place under the happiest auspices. Cyril had been duly presented to the Legislative Assembly as Caerleon's heir after the visit to Tatarjé, and the announcement was received with acclamation. An income was voted him from the public funds, and the title of Prince, already conferred informally by the people, granted him by a royal proclamation. Even M. Drakovics was content that the succession to the throne should thus be secured, for recent events had convinced him effectually that the King's marrying was out of the question. The first steps had been taken towards putting into operation the new liquor laws; and, although there had been a good deal of

discontent in the capital, in the country the people had grumbled and submitted. Most important of all, the Roumi Government had at length given way before the representations of Pannonia and her allies, and had agreed to recognise Caerleon's election as king, safeguarding the suzerain rights of the Grand Signior by the stipulation that he should nominate a special commissioner to attend the coronation and invest the new ruler with a portion of his insignia.

"We are getting on swimmingly," said Cyril, dropping into the Premier's office late in the afternoon, three or four days before the date fixed for the ceremony. "One almost wishes that things wouldn't all go quite so smoothly. It makes one think of chucking one's watch into the river, or making some other sacrifice of that sort to avert misfortune, like the ancients, you know. I believe my brain would give way under the pressure if it went on much longer. When Caerleon is safely crowned and off my hands I shall breathe freely."

"I have reason to believe," said M. Drakovics, "that the pro-Scythian party are planning to strike some blow during the coronation proceedings. All the indications seem to point to that, although we have been unable to discover what course they intend to take. They would scarcely try to burn the chapel a second time, but they might use dynamite, or attempt to get up a military *coup d'état*."

"And we must provide against those possibilities by rigorously excluding strangers from the ceremony, and associating the Carlino regiment with the city troops as guards," said Cyril. "Well, we have three days left for making preparations. I'm glad I just looked in. I thought you would probably have something to say to me."

"What is the King doing this afternoon?" asked M. Drakovics.

"Holding his review for the benefit of Prince Otto Georg, of course, with General Sertchaieff in attendance. When one has a foreign Prince to entertain, and a little army doing nothing, one may as well trot out one to amuse the other. By the bye, I believe that I have a crumpled rose-leaf in the fact that we can't get away from the Schwarzwald-Molzaus. One meets them all over Europe, and the meeting is neither unexpected nor a pleasure."

It may be noted, as sadly characteristic of the littleness of human nature, that neither Caerleon nor Cyril could find a good word to say of the Princess of Dardania. One had been deceived by her, the other had helped her to deceive him, but they made common cause against her.

"You would not think, looking at Prince Otto Georg now, that at the time of the Franco-Prussian war his name was in every one's mouth, would you?" said M. Drakovics. "He was a dashing young cavalry officer—very young—and I remember distinctly the incident which brought him into special notice. Our friend General Sertchaieff was, I believe, at the German headquarters at the time, and it was he who, when we were first compelled to seek a king, suggested, from his recollection of the matter, that the crown should be offered to Prince Otto Georg. The Prince was carrying despatches—for Moltke, I think—and was taken prisoner by a small body of French cavalry. He managed to destroy the despatches, but he had been made acquainted with the contents, and this his captors guessed. They were too far from their headquarters to take him there that night, and therefore they halted in a stable,

put their prisoner in the empty loft and took away the ladder, and sat down round a fire underneath. They must have got hold of some wine—at any rate, they went to sleep one by one, and the fire burned low. Prince Otto Georg watched his opportunity, and let himself drop from the entrance to the loft. He fell among the embers of the fire, and burnt his hands badly, but he crept past the Frenchmen to the spot where their horses were tied, unfastened them all, and led them across the grass until they were out of hearing. Then he mounted one, driving the rest before him for a short distance, after which he turned them loose and rode for his life, reaching his destination safely and delivering his message."

"You are quite right in saying that no one would imagine it who looked at him now," said Cyril, as M. Drakovics rose to escort him to the door. "By the bye, you have rather a good view of the river from this window. What steamer is that flying Pannonian colours?"

"A Scythian trader, I fancy," returned the Premier. "A good many of them hoist the Pannonian flag while they are here. It prevents unpleasantness, and we don't ask too many questions, knowing that we can gain nothing but benefit from their coming, even though it is under the rose. A thriving trade with Scythia would in itself be almost a guarantee of peace. This particular ship has just unloaded her cargo, and leaves to-morrow."

"Brought wheat, I suppose?"

"No; machinery for use in the arsenal. Sertchaieff has had two clerks on the wharf for three days checking all the cases as they were unloaded. When everything is in working order we shall be far more independent

of other nations than any of our neighbours. This is another piece of good news for your Highness to convey to his Majesty."

"Yes, I think that on the whole Caerleon has about as pleasant a berth as he could wish," responded Cyril as he went out.

It is generally recognised that our good fortune is always much more clearly visible to others than to ourselves, and the fact that Caerleon himself was totally unconvinced of the advantages of his position need not, therefore, excite any astonishment. If Cyril had thought fit to broach in his brother's presence his theory of the expedience of making some sacrifice to fortune in order to avert the perils arising from unbroken prosperity, Caerleon would have reminded him bitterly that his separation from Nadia was quite effectual in preventing him, at any rate, from growing intoxicated with success. His face was gloomy enough at the present moment as he rode up to the palace with his royal guest after the review, General Sertchajeff and a group of officers following them at some little distance. It was a wretched wintry afternoon, and only a German prince would have appreciated the compliment paid him in holding a review in his honour on such a day; but the courteous gentleman who rode beside the taciturn King was overflowing with contentment and good humour. Prince Otto Georg of Schwarzwald-Molzau was a gay young man of forty-five or so, a younger son of the reigning Grand-Duke, and said by his detractors to live on the reputation he had gained in the Franco-Prussian war, and on anticipations of a *guerre de revanche*. This was unkind, although it is undeniable that of late years he had been much better known in Paris or at Monte Carlo than on the parade-ground or

the manœuvre-field ; but there was a certain amount of truth in the accusation, for he was one of the men who are content to vegetate indefinitely unless aroused by some great stimulus. He had come to Bellaviste to represent his father at the coronation of Caerleon, ostensibly as a kind of *amende honorable* for Princess Ottilia's heartless conduct ; but as he was the brother of the Empress of Pannonia, it was generally believed that political considerations were not wholly unconnected with his visit. It was not, however, of politics that he was speaking as he rode up the street at the side of his host.

" You have the material for a fine army here," he said ; " but you want drill, drill, organisation, organisation. Your men are too much inclined to be independent, to act individually or in small bodies, without waiting for orders. Here we are in Europe—we do not, as in semi-savage warfare, need scouts, men of initiative. The ideal European army is absolutely a machine, without any thought or volition of its own, merely what is communicated to it by its head. If the different items forming that army once begin to try and think for themselves, whether in seeking cover or in making an advance, all is lost. Their only concern is to obey orders, and their commander's business is to obtain the victory. It is even more humane for the leader to be untrammelled, when he is once in action, by considerations as to the lives of his men, and so on, for he has planned his movements with the view of attaining a certain end with the minimum of loss, and they must be carried out exactly if he is to win. The better an army, the more completely is its will merged in that of its leader—that is to say, the more thoroughly is it drilled into a machine. Your men are more like Cos-

sacks, or irregular levies, at any rate, than thoroughly trained soldiers. It is easy to see that your army has been drilled by Scythians, not by Germans."

" You will hurt General Sertchaieff's feelings severely if you tell him that," said Caerleon, glancing back at the War Minister. " I believe we flatter ourselves that we are in a very high state of military efficiency."

Prince Otto Georg laughed silently. " Your *corps d'élite* amuses me," he said; " your city guard, I mean, and that portion of it especially which you call the palace guard. The uniforms of these gentlemen are so magnificent, and their drill is so lamentable—to a German eye, at least. They are beautiful to behold, but a much smaller number of good soldiers, or even of your Carlinos, would scatter them with the greatest ease. By the bye, is it true that you discovered a Scythian plot among the palace guard which led to the degradation of an officer ? "

" Not exactly," said Caerleon, " although we seem to have been victimised very ingeniously by the officer you mean. He presented himself here as having thrown up a post in the Scythian army for the purpose of joining us, and we gave him a commission. About a month ago we were warned of a plot, which contemplated murdering me, among other laudable objects, and to our surprise, for we had not heard anything to connect him with it, this man disappeared promptly. We have never succeeded in catching him, and all we could do was to outlaw him and strike his name off the roll with ignominy."

" You leave too much power and responsibility in the hands of these guards of yours," said Prince Otto Georg, abruptly. " They will grow to think themselves supreme in the State."

"We are doing our best to reduce their privileges gradually," replied Caerleon. "They have behaved extremely well so far, on the whole, and we have no excuse for heroic measures."

"Nevertheless, you would find such a measure your best policy, if I may venture to advise you," said the Prince. "I could almost envy you the task of bringing your army into shape. It might turn out little less exciting than actual war."

"Perhaps you would like the privilege of doing it?" suggested Caerleon. "But I forgot, you have declined it already. If you have no objection to telling me, I should very much like to hear why you refused the Thracian crown when it was offered you?"

"To tell the truth," replied the Prince, confidentially, "it was because I thought that I should find Thracia dull. Drakovics imagined that I was afraid to accept the offer, and I was afraid—that I should be bored. You see, it was not likely that my election would excite the opposition yours has done, for I had the Schwarzwald-Molzau influence behind me from the first. But under present circumstances, I must own, the position looks more hopeful. You have the army to reform, and also Drakovics to conquer. I see you are beginning to teach him that the State is not Drakovics, but he has not fully learnt the lesson even yet. Yes, I think that, on the whole, the situation is distinctly interesting."

"I am glad that it strikes you in that light," said Caerleon. "I suppose I am not up to the work."

"What! you are not thinking of abdicating?" asked the Prince, in dismay.

"Abdicating? No! Now that I'm here I'll stick to the place. The kingdom has cost me enough already, but I'll stay on until I'm driven out, and try the tem-

perance experiment properly, in spite of obstructionists and rioters."

"You take things too seriously, my dear fellow," said the older man compassionately. "Look at me. I live quietly, I am not devoted to philanthropy, or any other form of excitement. I recognise that these are days for management, not for despotism. If a wave of excitement of any kind should arise, it might carry me with it, though not by my own choice. Similarly, I might find it necessary, were I in your position, to issue a decree, and enforce its fulfilment, but I should much prefer to flatter the people into originating it themselves. But you young men must always plunge into things so madly. You will have prompt obedience, unreasoning submission instantly. You have not learned to take things easily."

"I am afraid I have an invincible prejudice in favour of wearing out rather than rusting out," said Caerleon; "and I think," he added, with a quiet smile, "that your own early history would be on my side, Prince, if I called it as a witness against you."

Prince Otto Georg smiled, much gratified by the compliment, and the atmosphere at the palace that evening was extremely agreeable. A State banquet had been held the night before in honour of the guest, but to-day, at Prince Otto's special request, General Sertchaieff had been invited to join the royal party informally, since he wished to have some conversation with him on the subject of the Franco-Prussian war. The War Minister was highly flattered by this mark of favour, and he exchanged reminiscences at great length with the Prince, which he was well qualified to do, having gone through the war attached, as a great favour, to the staff of one of the German princes. After such

an opening, it was not remarkable that the tone of the conversation continued to be extremely warlike, and became even undesirably technical in character, to the unmilitary auditor, when it turned on modern weapons and projectiles. This was in the smoking-room after dinner, and although Caerleon was quite content to allow the two visitors to discuss velocities and electric-firing apparatus together, Cyril objected to being left out in the cold, and after several valiant attempts succeeded at last in bringing the talk round to the comparatively simple theme of the use of the revolver in warfare. The two experts rose to the bait, and displayed as much enthusiasm with regard to the mechanism and weight of various types of revolvers as to those of the machine-gun, and Cyril, who flattered himself that he knew something about revolvers, was able to take part in the conversation.

"I wish I could show you what I mean," he said at last, after an animated discussion of various knotty points, "but we can't try pistol-practice in this room, for fear of breaking something." They were not in the sacred "den" which Caerleon had established in an out-of-the-way upper room, but in what might be called the State smoking-room, which had been furnished in gorgeous Moorish style by the late king. "Caerleon has a revolver of the kind I was describing, and I believe it's out and out the best."

"Let us send for it, if the Prince would like to see it," said Caerleon.

"I'll get it," said Cyril, "if you'll give me your keys. I'll get mine too. It's a newer make, but I'm sure it's not so good."

He returned in a few minutes with both weapons, and explained their action to the guests, General Sert-

chaeiff showing special interest in the subject, and examining the mechanism over and over again. Indeed, it appeared almost that he had looked at it too long for his peace of mind, for just before taking his leave, after arranging that the Prince should visit the arsenal in a day or two with Caerleon, in order to inspect the new machinery, which would then be unpacked, he might have been observed to slip Cyril's revolver into his own pocket, and take it away with him. Cyril did not happen to remember to look for it when he went to bed, and the loss was therefore not discovered. Prince Otto Georg was duly escorted to the rooms he occupied in the front of the palace, Caerleon and Cyril betook themselves to theirs in the southern wing, and silence settled down upon the building.

Cyril had been asleep for some time when he was awakened by a low, hurried tapping at his door. Sitting up in bed, he called to the intruder to come in, wondering sleepily why the sentry in the passage could not keep people from knocking him up in the middle of the night. To his astonishment it was Wright who entered, closing the door carefully behind him, and striking a match on his clothes as he advanced.

"How dare you come here like this, Wright?" demanded Cyril, angrily. "You must be drunk." Wright took no notice of the accusation, but lit a candle, and placed it in such a position that the mirror came between it and the window.

"No, my lord," arresting Cyril's hand as he was about to turn on the electric light, "don't show no more light, if you vally your life. I've been down at the stables, my lord, lookin' to 'is Majesty's charger, as was 'urt to-day by the General's 'orse knockin' up agin 'im, and when I come back to the 'ouse, I see as things ain't

right. Do your lordship know as there ain't a single sentry anywheres about? I come all the way up 'ere without meetin' one, nor a servant neither, right from the door I come in at."

"Good gracious!" cried Cyril, "there must be something wrong. Can the guards have deserted in a lump?"

"Well, my lord," said Wright, "they may be all a-sleepin' quiet in their beds, or they mayn't."

"We must go down and rout them out," said Cyril, getting out of bed. "You go in by this door, Wright, and wake the King, while I get some clothes on."

Almost the first thought that now occurred to Cyril's mind was the recollection of his revolver, but when he looked for it in vain in its accustomed place, he remembered that he must have left it down-stairs.

"I must go and hunt it up," he said to himself, as he hurried into his clothes. "Caerleon has got his, at any rate. I remember now that he was carrying it."

But while the words were in his mouth, Caerleon came in hastily in his shirt-sleeves, with his revolver in his hand.

"Who has been tampering with this, Cyril?" he asked, sharply. "Some one has given it a wrench, and the trigger won't work."

"There's something fishy about all these mysterious occurrences," said Cyril. "Does it strike you that our guns are at the other end of the house, and that we have no other weapons here?"

"If you ask me, my lords," said Wright, impressively, "I think there's foul play."

"Stuff!" said Caerleon. "Don't croak until you're told, Wright. If we can't find any weapons, we must get hold of something that will do instead—not that I

think there's any danger, but it's as well to be on the safe side."

"Of course," said Cyril, "the guards *may* have all struck work at once, and be enjoying sweet repose in their quarters, but the coincidence about the revolvers is suspicious."

"I have it!" cried Caerleon. "There are our dress-swords, which will be better than nothing. Put on a coat or something, Cyril, while I get them out, and don't stand there shivering."

He went back to his room, and returned with his own sword, while Wright unearthed Cyril's; and armed with these elaborate if not particularly dependable instruments of warfare, they prepared to start on their voyage of discovery.

"Haven't you got a weapon of any sort, Wright?" asked Caerleon of the groom.

"Buckle, your Majesty," returned Wright, unfastening the strap round his waist. "'E ain't bad at a pinch."

Thus unsatisfactorily accoutred, they set out along the corridor. The electric light was burning brightly, but, as Wright had said, there was not a human being to be seen. It felt almost uncanny to be marching noiselessly over the thick carpets, in the blaze of light, without hearing a sound or uttering a word, and Cyril and Wright caught themselves glancing apprehensively at the open doors of dark rooms and at the heavy folds of *portières*. As for Caerleon, he was far too much incensed against the guards on account of what he conceived to be their dereliction of duty to have any thought of supernatural terrors, or even of the more palpable danger of a possible enemy lurking to intercept him. His intention was to go straight to the

guard-room and give the guards a thorough fright, which would teach them not to confide too trustfully in their sovereign's drowsiness on another occasion. The head of the great staircase was reached without encountering any further suspicious circumstances; but Wright, looking out into the courtyard from a window, pointed out to Cyril in a whisper that there were no lights visible there. They began to descend the stairs, and as they did so, there was a sound of footsteps in the hall beneath, and several men appeared from the direction of the entrance. Both parties caught sight of each other at the same moment, and halted suddenly, Caerleon, Cyril, and Wright half-way between the head of the stair and the landing in the middle, the others on the lowest step. They were General Sertchajeff, Louis O'Malachy, and half-a-dozen stalwart troopers of the palace guard. For a moment astonishment kept every one silent, then Caerleon recovered himself.

"May I ask the meaning of this, General? What brings you to the palace at this hour, in the company of a man who is a traitor and a spy?"

"Milord Caerleon," returned the War Minister, "I am deputed by the National Convention to inform you that Thracia has returned to her true allegiance. The city is in the hands of the patriotic supporters of the exiled King, and you might well expect that no mercy would be shown you. Our gracious monarch, however, abhors bloodshed, even in the case of an adventurer whose usurpation began in fraud, and has been maintained by means of force and treachery, and it has been decided, in accordance with his expressed wish, to spare your life on condition of your abdicating and leaving the country instantly."

"And you are the person to bring me this message?" said Caerleon. "I hope I am to understand that you have been compelled to do so by force?"

"Milord," said General Sertchaieff, "your question touches my honour. I am acting of my own free will as the agent of my rightful sovereign, King Peter II."

"X!" cried Cyril. ".What fools we have been!" But the veins on Caerleon's forehead were swelling, and there was a dangerous glitter in his eye.

"Then you are a perjured traitor," was his answer to General Sertchaieff. "As for abdicating, I'll do nothing of the sort, and I'll leave the country just as soon as you can get me out of it, and not before."

"Come on, you bloomin' cowards!" yelled Wright, the joy of battle carrying him away. "We ain't afraid of yer! Eight men don't dare fight three. Yah!"

The long-drawn contempt infused into the last monosyllable appeared to stimulate the courage of the attacking party, and they made a rush up the steps and threw themselves upon the defenders, who were much embarrassed by the extent of their position, for the staircase was a very wide one. Cyril singled out General Sertchaieff as his opponent, and if any one had found time to watch them, a very pretty display of swordsmanship might have been seen. Louis O'Malachy had not mounted the stairs with the rest of his party, but had disappeared, apparently to summon further assistance, and the soldiers left their leader to account for Cyril, and devoted their attention to Caerleon. He found himself hard put to it to maintain his position against them, although Wright, using as a buckler a chair which he had caught up on the landing, rendered him yeoman service by dealing fierce and disabling blows with his belt on the heads and wrists of the

opposing swordsmen. All too soon Caerleon's untrustworthy blade broke off in his hand, and he was left to repel his assailants with the remaining half, but their shout of triumph distracted the attention of General Sertchaieff, who glanced aside for a moment, and in that moment Cyril ran him through the arm and obliged him to drop his sword. Wright whisked up the sword immediately, and thrust it into Caerleon's hand before any of the enemy could prevent him, and the fight was now of a more equal character, since General Sertchaieff was forced to retire disabled. He retreated no further than the half-way landing, however, and taking out his revolver, began to fire and load again as fast as he could with his left hand.

"If he's going to pot at us one by one, we're done for!" gasped Cyril.

"If he shoots no better than this, we're all right," returned Caerleon, breathlessly, and the fight went on in silence until a sudden exclamation of rage from Cyril showed the King his brother's sword shivered at his feet. At the same moment a heavy blow from behind threw him forward among the enemy, and a howl of fury from Wright proclaimed that an attack in the rear had proved successful. When Caerleon recovered his scattered senses, he found himself held down by four men, while Cyril and Wright were in a like predicament. Under cover of the noise made by General Sertchaieff's pistol practice, Louis O'Malachy had led a party round and captured the position from behind.

"I think your lordship will now see that it is expedient to submit without further resistance," said General Sertchaieff smoothly, as he tied a handkerchief round his wounded arm. Caerleon made no answer,

for he had caught Wright's eye, and seen his free hand stealing towards the ankle of one of the men who held him, and in another instant two of the captors had gone down with a crash, and Caerleon was on his feet and hitting out furiously, while Wright made herculean but unavailing efforts to join him. But the struggle was hopeless from the first, for Caerleon could not even get his back against the wall, and he was dragged down by sheer weight of numbers, and bound firmly with the tasselled cord torn from a curtain.

"I don't think you will get that undone," said Louis, bending over him and testing the knots, then, with that tendency towards the theatrical which besets a certain class of Irishmen in moments of excitement, he kicked him heavily, adding, "That is for my sister."

"Nasty coward!" growled Wright. "'It a man when 'e's down that you don't dare touch when 'e's up, and bring in a young lady's name about it, you precious blackguard, do!"

"Captain O'Malachy," interrupted General Sertchaeff, as Louis advanced threateningly towards his unconquerable assailant, "if you will be so good as to take three men and secure the person of the Prince of Schwarzwald-Molzau, I will wait here with the prisoners for your return."

Louis departed instantly, to return before long with a laugh.

"No fighting there. He accepts the situation with great philosophy," he said, and Caerleon felt oddly disappointed. Something had given him the idea that he might reckon on Prince Otto Georg for support at this crisis.

"Your presence is now required down-stairs, milord," said General Sertchaeff. "If you will give yourself

the trouble of walking, it will be as well; otherwise we must take you."

Choosing the less of the two evils, Caerleon allowed himself to be dragged to his feet and conducted down the stairs to his study by his captors, wondering vaguely whether a scaffold and a block would meet his eyes on entering. Nothing of the kind was visible, however, although the room was crowded with people—officers of the palace and city guards mostly, with a sprinkling of civilians, principally officials connected with the Ministry of War, and a number of men of foreign appearance, who were evidently exiles returned from Scythia. On the writing-table lay a document, which General Sertchaieff presented to Caerleon as a formal deed of abdication, and demanded his signature.

"I thought you had done with that foolery," said Caerleon. "I have told you already that I won't abdicate."

"Milord," said the War Minister, impressively, "we are anxious not to shed blood, but we are not men to be trifled with; and if you refuse to sign the paper, Captain O'Malachy has his orders."

"Sign under compulsion," whispered Cyril. "I can bear witness that you were forced by threats to do it, and it can't stand."

"Shut up, Cyril!" said Caerleon, gruffly. "Have you unlimited time to waste, General?"

"At least consider your brother and your servant, who must suffer with you if you remain obstinate, instead of returning in safety to England," said General Sertchaieff.

"If 'is Majesty will say anything to get me my 'ands free for a moment, fust thing I do, I'll give you one in the eye," said Wright, ferociously.

"We are to understand, then, milord, that you refuse finally to sign the deed ?" asked the General.

"I do refuse," said Caerleon, "and if there is one man here, of all those who have taken oaths of allegiance to me and have eaten my bread, who has one spark of honesty left in him, I hope he will let it be known that I preferred death to abdication."

"May I ask whether you are referring to me ?" demanded Louis O'Malachy. "I have not offered to carry any messages of yours to my unhappy sister."

"No, I don't think you ever had a spark of honesty in you," returned Caerleon. "And as for your sister, to send a message to her through you would be to insult her."

"Captain O'Malachy, you will conduct the prisoners to the river-bank, and follow the directions you have received," said General Sertchaeff.

Caerleon drew a long breath. To be led out, and shot like a dog ! But his stubborn English pride came to his aid. Show any sign of flinching before these Scythian spies and Thracian traitors ? Never ! and he squared his shoulders and held his head erect as he was led out of the room. On the threshold a thought struck him, and he paused to say—

"I do not know whether this rebellion is to be conducted according to the usages of civilised nations in time of war, but in any case I entreat you, for the honour of Thracia, to allow Prince Otto Georg of Schwarzwald-Molzau to return unharmed to his own country. He came here merely as my guest, and has taken no part in Thracian politics."

"Make your mind easy, milord," said a tall man, with a strong likeness to General Sertchaeff, who stood among the returned exiles. "As the representative of

my gracious sovereign, I can assure you that the King of Thracia does not make war on non-combatants."

Caerleon bowed his head in acknowledgment of the reply, and followed his guards. They passed through the courtyard, where the first snow lay on the ground, new-fallen, then out through the gardens. A few steps further brought them to the batteries on the river-face of the town, and they were ordered to enter the lift by which shells and ammunition were raised from the shore. The descent accomplished, they came out on the bank of the river, where a boat was lying, manned by two sailors whom Louis addressed in Scythian. The prisoners were thrust in without ceremony, the soldiers took their places, and the boat was pushed off from the shore.

"Caerleon," said Cyril, in a low voice, "I'm sorry I've brought you to this, old man. If I had had the sense to see through that blackguard O'Malachy, it wouldn't have happened."

"Oh, don't go and blame yourself," said Caerleon, hastily. "It's just as much my fault. Wright, I wish you were not obliged to lie just on my chest. No, don't wriggle, that's worse."

"Silence, dogs!" said one of the soldiers, angrily, and the boatmen rowed steadily on until they reached the Scythian steamer which had attracted Cyril's notice that afternoon. The prisoners were dragged up the ladder, and placed in a row on the deck.

"You have one more chance," said Louis O'Malachy to Caerleon. "Will you sign?"

"No," returned Caerleon, doggedly.

"Then I must carry out my orders. Your fate is on your own head."

CHAPTER XXI.

A REVOLT OR A REVOLUTION ?

WHILE Caerleon and his two companions were lying bound on the grand staircase of the palace, under the charge of General Sertchaieff, Prince Otto Georg was aroused from sleep by a sudden incursion of armed men into his room. Sitting up, he blinked curiously at them as their leader turned on the electric light and came to his bedside.

"It is my duty to inform your Highness that you are my prisoner," were the words which met his ears, and which were emphasised by the casual display of a revolver in the hand of the speaker.

"I do not think," said the Prince, with extreme mildness, fumbling the while mechanically but unsuccessfully for his eyeglass, "that I have the pleasure of recognising your face, sir. When were you presented to me ?"

"My name is O'Malachy," returned the intruder, "and I am a captain in the army of King Peter II. of Thracia. It is unfortunate that your Highness's visit to Bellaviste should chance to coincide with a slight readjustment of affairs here—the restoration of the rightful sovereign, and the overthrow of the tyranny under which the country has groaned for so long."

"I assure you that I fully perceive my presence to be *de trop* in these painful domestic circumstances," said the Prince.

"Pray do not imagine for a moment that your Highness will be put to any inconvenience. You are the guest of King Peter instead of the usurper Carlino, that is all. I regret that I am obliged, merely as a matter of form, to post a sentry, by General Sertchajeff's directions, in the corridor outside your door, with orders to fire if you attempt to leave your room."

"In that case, you may be sure that I will not trouble the sentry," said Prince Otto Georg, blandly. "But before I wish you good-night, Herr Captain, perhaps you will kindly enlighten me on one point. What of King Carlino? Did I understand you to say that he had abdicated the throne?"

"The propriety of doing so has not yet been represented to him," returned Louis, "but there can be little doubt that he will find it advisable to yield quietly. A pistol at the head, Highness, is occasionally a powerful persuasive."

"Thanks; I will not detain you longer," and the Prince waved his hand politely, and laid his head on the pillow again. "If I know anything of my young friend Carlino, he will choose the pistol," he mused, as Louis and his men left the room, and the former locked the door on the outside. For a moment the prisoner lay listening, while the sentry began his measured tramp up and down the corridor, then he sat up suddenly.

"Let me think," he said to himself. "There may yet be a chance of doing something. For these plotters, there are two points of attack, Carlino and Drakovics. Both men must be in their hands to give them any hope of success. Now it is scarcely likely that their numbers

are sufficient to allow them to seize both at once—that is, to obtain the mastery of the palace and the town at one blow. Which will they attempt to capture first? Drakovics is the most important—Carlino is a figure-head, comparatively speaking—but still, I think this is one of the cases in which the natural foolishness of mankind may safely be considered as a factor. The seizure of Carlino would appear a greater success at first—and it would give them the command of the palace, which they could defend against the town, while the town could not long hold out against a foe in possession of the palace. They have, then, concentrated their strength on the palace in order to make a prisoner of the King, and while they are doing their best to induce him to abdicate, it may yet be possible to warn Drakovics."

Prince Otto Georg was out of bed now, and dressing in the dark with the speed and silence of an old campaigner. Hurrying into his boots and a fur-lined coat, he went to the window, drew up the blind noiselessly, and looked out.

"Snow!" he said. "So far, so good."

He returned and took one of the sheets from the bed, then, with the utmost care, opened the window, which was fortunately a casement, and moved easily. As has been already mentioned, the room was in the front of the palace, and the window opened directly two or three feet above the great porch. Here Prince Otto had noticed the day before a hinged iron ladder, folded up and concealed by the coping from the view of any one below, but ready in case of fire. He climbed out upon the leaden roof of the porch and looked round. No light shone from any of the windows on this side of the building, and the great door was fast shut. The conspirators had made their entrance through the courtyard

from the back, and the sentries who kept guard in front of the palace on ordinary occasions had forsaken their posts like the rest, while it had not occurred to Louis to place any others. There was not a soul to be seen. Prince Otto Georg drew out and unfolded the ladder, let it down over the side of the porch, and fastening it firmly at the top by the hooks attached to it, descended it in safety. It was impossible to remove it when he had reached the ground, and he could only hope that, as the side of the porch was in deep shadow, it might escape the notice of any one who might chance to come out at the front door.

"And now," he said to himself, wrapping the sheet round him, "one may as well take every precaution, painful as it would be to be discovered in this costume. To think of my giving myself all this trouble for the sake of a man I saw for the first time the day before yesterday!"

Gathering up the ends of the sheet, he walked cautiously across the garden, indistinguishable among the whitened shrubs to any one looking out of the windows of the palace. But on arriving at the wall he found his further progress impeded, for there was a sentry on guard at the gate, and another at the corner overlooking the town. Prince Otto groaned mentally, but there was no help for it. Choosing a spot as remote as possible from both sentries, he climbed the wall by the aid of a tree which grew beside it, and threw his fur-lined coat over into the road. This done, he let himself drop from the branches, with considerably less agility and confidence in his own powers than he had felt at the time of his former exploit of the kind, but with happier results, for the coat broke his fall, and he rose unhurt, and after creeping a short distance in the

shadow of the wall, turned down a side-street, and made the best of his way to M. Drakovics's house. In spite of the highly logical reasoning with which he had started on his journey, he felt a good deal of misgiving as to whether he had been justified in calculating so confidently on human folly; and it was with unfeigned joy that on coming round the corner of the house he caught sight of the Premier standing at a window with a light behind him, and looking out at the river. To attract his attention was the work of a moment, and in obedience to the call M. Drakovics, in extreme astonishment, hastened to admit his visitor by a side-door. There was no time for lengthy explanations.

"There is a plot to depose the King and restore the house of Franza, headed by General Sertchaieff and Captain O'Malachy. They have seized the palace, and the King is in their hands. By the uniforms of the men whom I saw, I believe that both the palace and the city guard are implicated."

After the first exclamation of surprise, M. Drakovics remained silent, passing his hand thoughtfully over his chin, until the Prince had finished speaking.

"When your Highness arrived, I was watching the Scythian steamer in the river," he said. "Boats have been going to and fro between her and the quay all evening, and it struck me that something was wrong. No doubt they were bringing arms on shore."

"What do you intend to do?" asked Prince Otto Georg, interrupting his meditation impatiently. "Have you men enough whom you can trust to defend this house, or the Hôtel de Ville?"

"The police are staunch," returned M. Drakovics; "but to oppose them to the city guard would be simply massacre. There are not enough of them. No! Is

your Highness prepared for flight? To reach the Carlino barracks is our only hope."

"If you think we can do more good there, I am ready to go," said the Prince. "But what about the city, and your adherents?"

"The conspirators will not injure the city, since they must be reckoning upon the townspeople as their chief support," said M. Drakovics; "and if your Highness will wait for one instant, I will do what I can to warn the most prominent among the Carlinists."

He turned aside to a speaking-tube, and after the preliminary whistle, began to converse with some person apparently at the other end of the house.

"A band of traitors have formed a plot to restore the Franzia dynasty. They are in possession of the palace and of the King's person, and will be here in a few minutes. Listen carefully to what I say. You will offer no resistance. No, I do not want your comments; listen. You will say that I am spending the night out of town. If you are further questioned, I trust to your ingenuity to account for my absence. Telephone now at once to the bureaus of all the other Ministers, except the Ministry of War, that the situation is to be accepted until I send word to the contrary. If the Sertchaieffs turn you out of your offices, submit; if not, go on as usual. Of course you will take no oath to Peter Franzia, on pain of being dealt with as traitors when I return. Keep me informed at the Carlino barracks of anything you may discover with regard to the extent and progress of the conspiracy. You understand?"

The invisible auditor apparently answered that he did, for M. Drakovics replaced the plug in the mouth of the tube, and turned to Prince Otto Georg.

"I am sorry to have kept your Highness waiting so long. If you will come this way, we shall find my boat in its shed."

They hurried down the garden to the river, and got out the boat. M. Drakovics, who was well accustomed to the water, took possession of both oars, remarking drily that there was no time to waste in giving rowing lessons just then. Prince Otto Georg pushed the boat off, and they began to drop down with the current, keeping in the shade of the bank. Presently M. Drakovics uttered a stifled exclamation, and the Prince, glancing over his shoulder, saw that the Scythian steamer had left her moorings, and was also dropping down the stream. It was not long before she passed them, the wash caused by her screw making the boat rock.

"If only we could intercept her under the barracks!" sighed the Premier. "But she is much more likely to intercept us. If they discover that I have escaped by water they will signal to her from the palace, and she will pick us up. We will row only as far as the outskirts of the city, and then walk to the barracks."

This programme was carried out, rather to the relief of Prince Otto Georg, who was more at home on land than in a boat. A brisk walk of two miles, uninterrupted by any exciting incidents, brought them to the barracks, where they were duly challenged by a sentry, rescued by the guard, and conducted into the presence of the hastily aroused and arrayed commandant. M. Drakovics detailed what had happened, and the acting colonel, in response to his suggestion, immediately alarmed his force, and gave orders to prepare the place for defence in case of an attack from the town. This done, an informal council of war was called, com-

posed of the chief officers of the regiment, Prince Otto, and the Premier.

"First of all, Colonel, are your men to be trusted?" asked M. Drakovics.

"They are devoted heart and soul to King Carlino," was the soldier's reply. "The news you brought has put them into a perfect frenzy."

"Good," said M. Drakovics. "I wonder whether the same can be said of the garrisons in the provinces? Perhaps you will have the goodness to telegraph inquiries to the fortresses with which you are in communication, Colonel?"

A young officer left the room to carry out the order, but returned with the news that no communication could be established with any other station.

"I thought so," said M. Drakovics. "They have cut the telegraph wires. This plot is a larger thing than we anticipated, gentlemen. Be so good as to have a horse and a mounted escort prepared for me, Colonel. I must start before morning to rouse the country."

"Pardon me," interrupted Prince Otto Georg. "May I inquire whether you have any guns here, Colonel, that will carry as far as the town?"

"Alas, no!" replied the Colonel. "Our guns are very old-fashioned, and useful only for firing salutes. His Excellency the Premier will remember that there was some question lately of erecting regular fortifications upon this hill, and quartering a battery of garrison artillery here, but that the Minister for War opposed the suggestion on the ground of the shock such a proceeding would give to the susceptibilities of the people of Bellaviste."

"I remember," said M. Drakovics, curtly. "But what was your Highness's idea?"

"It struck me that the threat of shelling the town might enable us to secure the King's being given up to us unhurt," said the Prince.

"Ah, General Sertchajeff knows our resources too well for that. But I very much fear that we may even now be too late to save the King."

"What!" was the general cry. "You cannot imagine——"

"I do not for a moment believe that he will consent to abdicate, and I fear they will not keep him a prisoner, lest the Thracians should rally to release him."

"But as a hostage for themselves in case of defeat?"

"They do not mean to be defeated. They are fighting with ropes round their necks, and to murder the King would be a plain declaration that they had left themselves no way of escape. They are well supported, but they know that there is no help for them if they fail."

"Then you think that this conspiracy is incited by Scythia?"

"Not openly, of course. Scythia's opportunity will come later, when she can throw troops into the country under pretext of curing disorder. No; she has merely allowed fugitives from us to take refuge and hatch their plots upon her soil, and there may possibly be a few retired Scythian officers who have returned with them. But Scythia has not authorised them to come, nor supplied them officially with money. If they succeed, she will reap the advantage of their labours; if they fail, she will disown them."

"It is possible that there may be retired officers of other armies who will take the opposite side," said Prince Otto Georg. "Allow me, your Excellency, to offer myself as a volunteer."

"Your Highness is most welcome," said the Premier.
"You will not, I trust, involve yourself in any difficulty
with Germany upon our account?"

"If the telegraph wires are cut, no remonstrance can
reach me," said the Prince, drily.

"In that case," said M. Drakovics, "I may give utter-
ance to my most earnest wish under the circumstances.
I know you will agree with me, gentlemen, that we can-
not do better than invite his Serene Highness to direct
the military operations for the recovery of the capital.
Our own Commander-in-Chief has betrayed his trust,
and the officer next in seniority to him is a *protégé* of
his, the commandant of Tatarjé. Prince Otto Georg of
Schwarzwald-Molzau is the pupil of Moltke, and has
had a larger experience of war than any of us can boast.
If you concur in my suggestion, I will draw up a formal
invitation to him to take the command of the army be-
fore I start on my journey."

The officers made no objection to the appointment,
and indeed, in the helpless condition to which they
were reduced by the cutting of the telegraph wires,
and their ignorance of the state of feeling in the
other garrisons, to say nothing of the treachery of
their natural leader, they were only too glad to feel
a strong hand at the helm. Moreover, they had
feared that M. Drakovics might be about to install
himself as Commander-in-Chief, and it was a relief
to their minds to obtain a soldier instead. Prince
Otto Georg's appointment was therefore received with
acclamations, and when M. Drakovics departed on his
journey, he left him firmly established in his post.

To describe in any detail the doings of the next three
days would be a task both long and dreary. As soon
as it was light on the first morning, an officer, bearing

a flag of truce, was despatched to the city to ask for an assurance of the safety of the King, but he was fired upon from the gate, and obliged to return without gaining any information. News on other points was, however, obtained in various ways. In spite of the absence of telegraphic communication, Prince Otto Georg received constant intelligence through messengers. From M. Drakovics's confidential clerk in Bellaviste he learned, by means of a cipher letter carried by a fisherman, that nothing had been seen or heard of Caerleon, but that King Peter Franzia was not among the returned exiles, having preferred to remain at Nice in trustful quietness while his faithful subjects regained his throne for him. General Sertchiaeoff's brother, the late Premier, was, however, one of those who had returned, and was now at the head of affairs. He had taken possession of the Government offices, and had levied a certain sum of money from the town—a measure which had called forth much opposition from the people, although the city guard enforced the payment of the impost. News arrived also from M. Drakovics. The garrison of Feodoratz he found to be staunchly Carlinist, while that of Tatarjé was divided, and the division was carried to such a point that the detachment which sympathised with the house of Franzia had already set out for Bellaviste with the commandant in order to join the insurgents. This was Prince Otto Georg's opportunity. Posting his men in a wood on the road by which the mutineers were expected to arrive, he attacked them unawares as they straggled along in a disorderly crowd, captured the field-artillery they were bringing with them, and left only a few scattered fugitives to carry the news to Bellaviste.

This victory proved to possess a double value for the Carlinists. Not only did it deprive the rebels of the reinforcement they had been anxiously expecting, but the news of the battle, spreading with extraordinary rapidity from village to village, came in the nick of time to secure the allegiance of the people, who were bewildered by the sudden rush of events. The country gentlemen and their mountain clans required no such earnest of the eventual success of the Carlinist cause; but the bulk of the dwellers in the more settled districts were accustomed by long tradition to side with the party in power, and it is undoubtedly startling to retire to rest one night knowing that you have an idolised King on the throne, and a determined Minister exercising all the functions of government, and to find on awaking in the morning that your King has probably been in murdered, and certainly been dethroned, while your Premier is stumping the country for support. In such a case it was difficult for the obedient partisans of "Government" to know exactly who the Government was, and Prince Otto Georg's victory came just when it was needed to quiet their minds. He took his prizes back in triumph to the barracks, and the whole of the next day was spent in maturing and preparing with their aid his plan of attack on the city. At night M. Drakovics returned from his tour of the outlying districts, bringing with him a military contingent drawn from the faithful portion of the Tatarjé garrison, and an irregular force of mountain chiefs and their retainers.

"I half hoped that your Highness might have retaken the city by this time," he said to Prince Otto Georg.

"I never strike until I am ready," replied the Prince, and M. Drakovics deferred to his wider experience, nor

did he, when the plan of attack had been explained to him, regret that he had done so.

The next morning—the third after the seizure of the palace—broke dull and hazy, a fact which Prince Otto Georg hailed with delight as of the greatest moment to his scheme. During the two days that he had held office he had stopped all the vessels which came up the river, so that he had now under the guns of the barracks a miniature fleet of small steamers and cargo-boats, from which he selected a certain number to convey the greater portion of the artillery which he had captured from the Tatarjé rebels. Each vessel mounted one gun, and carried a small number of soldiers, sufficient merely to work it and to defend the ship. Before it was light these ships were now towed up the river in perfect silence by boats with muffled oars, and anchored close under the batteries, the fire from which would, owing to this precaution, pass harmlessly overhead. The batteries had been constructed to command the deep channel in which alone warships could anchor, and their guns were hopelessly unable to reach the small river-steamers with their light draught of water. Secured in this way against interference from above, the vessels opened fire on the town, and maintained their position with ease, even beating off successfully a boat-expedition led against them by Louis O'Malachy. Although the effect of the firing was small, since Prince Otto Georg's object was to frighten rather than hurt, it was evident that the rebels regarded the situation as serious, for they left the batteries which they had been engaged in constructing in other parts of the town, and began to throw one up at the end of M. Drakovics's garden, with the intention of rendering the position of the vessels untenable. This gave the Prince the

opportunity for which he had been waiting. He had very soon perceived that when the rebels had effected their great *coup*, and had telegraphed to the various European capitals the news of the revolution (as M. Drakovics informed him had certainly been done), and then cut the wires, they had worked themselves at least as much harm as their opponents. If they had managed to capture M. Drakovics as they had intended, all would have been well; but they had been baulked in this, and he, once outside the limited zone in which the wires were cut, had used the telegraph to call together his adherents from all parts of the country, while they had no means either of gaining information or of sending orders to their more distant supporters. Disappointed of the help they had expected from Tatarjé, their action would necessarily be partial and undecided, since they had no idea of the extent to which their views found support outside the capital, although it was evident that the country had not risen in their favour as they had anticipated. It was true that they had made an attempt at a cavalry reconnaissance the day before; but the troopers had been driven back into the town in disorder with the help of the guns taken from the Tatarjé contingent, and at the present moment every one was far too much engrossed by the attack on the river-face to think about obtaining information on the land side.

Once assured that his naval demonstration was successful, Prince Otto Georg led the main body of his little army, together with two guns which he had reserved for this purpose, round to the other side of the city, remote alike from the river and the Carlino barracks. By taking advantage of every scrap of cover

afforded by the woods and rising ground, he succeeded in performing this manœuvre without its being perceived by the townspeople, the attention of whose leaders was completely occupied by the attack on the river-face. Bringing his guns into position on the edge of a wood, he formed up his men in readiness to advance, and opened fire on the gate nearest him, following up the first effective shot by an immediate rush forward. The small guns mounted on the wall, and served by half-hearted townsmen, who were by no means anxious to provoke an artillery fire which would probably bring their houses about their ears, had little result in checking the advance of the besiegers, and before the rebel leaders could be recalled from their futile labours on the other side of the city, the gate was down and the Carlinists were pouring in.

Prince Otto Georg smiled grimly as he watched the operations from a point of vantage. "Never trust citizens to defend their town," he said. "They surrendered Strasburg."

The worst of the fighting was yet to come. From house to house and from street to street Prince Otto Georg's soldiers made their way, with their ranks at one moment swelled by a band of welcoming sympathisers, at another thinned by a stream of fire from some public building turned into a fortress, and fiercely defended by desperate men, who had rushed from the river-face to make a last effort for their lives. While one party of the assailants was making for the palace, two others were gaining possession of the walls, and turning the guns there upon the quarters where the strongest resistance was experienced; and the Prince himself appeared to be ubiquitous, alike in keeping up communications with the strong force he had left to hold the gate, guard-

ing against a flank attack by an overlooked force of the enemy, and moderating the fierceness of the strife by proclaiming, whenever he could get a hearing, quarter to those who were willing to lay down their arms. After all, the bulk of the townspeople were very glad to submit to the besiegers. The exactions of the rebels had not endeared them to any one within the walls, and there had been rumours of what was to happen to the faithless city on King Peter's return which caused most people to tremble for their property, if not for their lives. Only the men of the city guard, knowing, as M. Drakovics had said, that they fought with ropes round their necks, persisted in maintaining the fight, making a stand at every available point, and at last crowding with their leaders into the palace for a final effort.

Even now, if it had been possible to move the great guns from the river batteries to the palace, and turn them against the town, the result of the day's fighting might have been different; but time and appliances were alike wanting for this operation, and after a short resistance the wall of the garden was scaled, and the rebels made their last stand in the palace itself.

"Take them alive! Take them alive!" had been the reiterated order of Prince Otto Georg and M. Drakovics. "*They know what has become of the King,*" and the Carlinists, mad with rage and fight though they were, did their best to obey. When the stubborn contest ended at last, Ivan Sertchaieff, the Premier, lay dead on the grand staircase where Caerleon had been taken prisoner; his brother, less fortunate, was in the hands of the victors, and with him were Louis O'Malachy and about a score of others. The civilians of the party were committed to the custody of the police, who had been imprisoned in their barracks by the rebels, and had done

good service by breaking out during the street-fighting and joining the Carlinists. A summary court-martial sat immediately, under the presidency of Prince Otto Georg, to try such of the prisoners as had belonged to the army, while M. Drakovics, who had fought his way in with the troops, searched the palace and interrogated the other captives as to the King's whereabouts.

What the Prince was chiefly anxious to discover from the men before him was the extent to which the disaffection which had led to the rebellion had spread in the army and in the country, and also whether Scythia had committed herself to any definite encouragement of the scheme; but from General Sertchaeff he could gain nothing but a denial of the competency of the tribunal to try him, from Louis a declaration that he was a Scythian subject, and from the rest more or less vehement protestations of devotion to the house of Franzia and of their readiness to die in its service. The competence of a court presided over by the Commander-in-Chief to try officers undoubtedly belonging to the army could not be seriously questioned, and the trial proceeded with due ceremony until it was interrupted by a tremendous uproar outside the hall. Prince Otto Georg ordered the sentries to clear the approaches to the court; but the moment that the door was opened a motley throng of Carlinists streamed in, with M. Drakovics, wrathful and agitated, at their head.

"What is the meaning of this unseemly proceeding?" inquired Prince Otto Georg. "I am surprised that you should so far forget the gravity of the occasion as to interrupt the trial."

He was addressing himself to M. Drakovics; but his words were drowned by the excited crowd, who pressed about the prisoners with shouts and gestures of rage,

and were only prevented from rushing upon them by the exertions of the guards.

"Where is the King?" they cried. "Give us back our Carlino!"

"Gentlemen," said M. Drakovics, addressing the officers who formed the court, "I am grieved beyond measure to tell you that we have searched the palace and a great part of the city, but we can find no trace of our beloved sovereign."

General Sertchaeff smiled sardonically. "It is scarcely likely that you will," he said.

"Great heaven!" cried Prince Otto Georg; "they have murdered him, then!"

"You will not find it easy to bring him back," went on General Sertchaeff. "Ask Captain O'Malachy if you wish to hear what has become of your Carlino." It was evident from his tone that he anticipated a surprise for his hearers; but it was also clear that when Louis spoke he received one himself. While the rapid dialogue was in progress, Louis had been weighing the situation in his mind. Would truth or falsehood serve the cause best at this juncture? The fate of his comrades and himself was already sealed, and nothing that he could say or refrain from saying would avail to save any of them. But what of that? It was still possible to produce an impression which might go far to effect the object aimed at by the revolt. Were Caerleon alive, the Drakovics party would rally around him in irresistible strength; if he were dead, the weary, dispiriting search for a King must begin again, with all the jealousies and strifes it involved, and the opportunity it offered to Scythia for armed intervention. He hesitated no longer.

"You will certainly consult the best authority," he

said, sarcastically. "I had the honour of being present during his Majesty's last moments."

A howl of rage went up from the crowd of Carlinists, and the rest of the prisoners repressed a start of astonishment.

"You killed him?" was the cry. Louis bowed calmly.

"That duty fell to me," he said.

"But how? where?" asked many voices.

"I took him on board the Scythian steamer," returned Louis, "with his brother and his English servant. They were all bound. I stabbed them one after the other, and threw their bodies into the river."

"But why on board the steamer?" asked Prince Otto Georg.

"Because it was feared that some of our less ardent supporters might object to Carlino's death if it was carried out before their eyes," said Louis.

"You give us to understand that you murdered three unarmed men in cold blood?" said Prince Otto Georg. "This is inconceivable. Human nature is not capable of so horrible an atrocity, though why you should attempt to deceive us in such a matter I cannot imagine. You are not in earnest?"

"Am I likely to tell you anything but the truth at such a moment, and on such a subject?" retorted Louis. "Your Carlino is dead, and I killed him. I have not yet heard any of my comrades," he glanced round at his fellow-prisoners, "deliver the dying message with which he charged them. I am the only honest one among them, after all. He wished it to be known that he chose death rather than abdication. Well, he had it."

"You—a soldier," said the Prince to General Sertchajeff, "and connived at the commission of this dastardly murder?"

"We did not expect to make our revolution with rose-water," returned the ex-Minister. "Our intention was to surprise Carlino, and to force him to abdicate by means of threats, if possible; but Captain O'Malachy had strict orders to kill him if any resistance or rescue were attempted, and he did so."

"I should wish to adjourn the court," said Prince Otto George. "I do not feel that I can conduct business properly after receiving this terrible news."

"Then the mountain men will break in and tear the prisoners to pieces," said M. Drakovics, in a low voice, glancing at the crowd of excited peasants who stood with weapons in their hands, muttering imprecations and glaring at the self-accused murderers. "I entreat your Highness to bring the trial to a close, so that it may be evident that the murderers will meet the punishment demanded by their crimes, and then to come with me to break the news to the people."

Prince Otto Georg turned impatiently to the papers on the table before him, and M. Drakovics succeeded in inducing his followers to leave the hall by assuring them that summary justice would be done by the court-martial. Indeed, the evidence was so clear that there could be no doubt of the result of the trial. Even leaving out of sight the added atrocity of the murder of the King, the prisoners had committed a sufficient number of crimes against both military and civil law to cause them to incur the death-penalty several times over. There was not a dissentient voice among the members of the court, and the President pronounced the sentence with a sensation not far removed from loathing.

"I never saw a man so bloodthirsty as that O'Malachy," he said to himself as he left the chair after the prisoners had been removed. "I believe that the

murder was his doing altogether, for Sertchajeff seemed at first as much surprised as I was. I wonder whether there could have been any truth in that story about a sister of his that got into the Scythian papers? It would account for his peculiar ferocity."

It would have afforded Louis additional gratification had he known that the apparent purposelessness of his conduct had cast a slur upon Caerleon's name, but he was very well content as things were. His was not the part of the informer, who is said to be present, by some strange fatality, whenever two Irishmen are plotting together, and through whom the best-laid schemes go wrong; on the contrary, he had carried out his share of the conspiracy with triumphant success, and even at the bitter end had turned defeat into victory. Of this character were his exultant musings as he was led away with his companions, but in indulging such hopeful anticipations he was reckoning without his host. M. Drakovics's proverbial resourcefulness had not forsaken him at this crisis, and from the moment of hearing the fatal news of Caerleon's death he had been preparing a *coup d'état*. When Prince Otto left the hall in which the court-martial had been held, he found that he was awaiting him, and the two men rode down the steep street with their escort to the Hôtel de Ville, in the square in front of which were assembled the loyal townspeople and the irregular troops. A momentary cheer saluted the Premier and his companion as they made their appearance on the balcony; but the news of the King's murder had spread among the people, and the feeling of mourning was universal. The soldiers alone greeted Prince Otto Georg with shouts when M. Drakovics presented him to the crowd as the saviour of Thracia, and he retired into the background while his

companion came forward again to speak. The crowning triumph of the great orator's eloquence was to be obtained to-day, and the lack of responsiveness among his audience only served to stimulate him to surpass himself.

He began his speech by paying a well-deserved tribute to the troops, both regular and irregular, who had fought so bravely in crushing the revolt. Their courage and endurance had been beyond all praise ; but they had been sustained by the hope of rescuing their beloved King from the hands of the dastardly conspirators who sought to deprive him of his throne. The struggle was successful, the victory was won, but, alas ! success had come too late. Their young sovereign, who had given up the splendid prospects which belonged to him in his own country in order to lead the forlorn hope in Thracia, had chosen to die rather than forsake the trust he had received from the people. He was the last martyr on the glorious roll of Thracian independence. Let them look around them. There on the hill above them was the sacred shrine at which, that very day, Carlino was to have received the crown of Thracia, and there also was the palace in which he should have lived for many happy years, beloved and honoured. But beside them there flowed the river, accursed from that day forward, whose waters had rolled over his blood-stained corpse, and there remained yet in the land of the living the miscreants who had not scrupled to murder in cold blood a bound and defenceless man.

The yell of mingled rage and grief which arose from the people at these words rendered it impossible for the speaker to proceed with his oration for some minutes ; but at last he succeeded in restoring comparative silence, broken only by the sobs of the women. What now

remained for Thracia ? he demanded. She had lost her place among the nations ; she could not protect the stranger who had come at her call to assist her. But at least she could avenge his death, both on the traitors who had sprung from her own soil and on the perfidious nation which had stooped to use such instruments to further its shameful ends. With this object in view let her proceed without an hour's delay to the election of another king, and who could be better fitted for the post than the illustrious Prince who had been raised up by Providence to help her in her utmost need, and who had striven side by side with her own sons for the rescue of Carlino ? That Prince, he went on, checking by an imperative gesture the protest which Prince Otto Georg sprang forward to make, had shrunk once already from accepting the throne, owing to a sensitive modesty which did him all honour, but this was no time for holding back. Thracia appealed to him to accept the place left vacant by the man who had been moved by its very difficulties to undertake it,—would the German hang behind where the Englishman had pressed forward ? Let the Prince make his decision, knowing, as he did, that his election would be hailed with delight by the country, and welcomed by all Europe with the exception of Scythia, and let him devote his life to the avenging of Caerleon's murder.

Prince Otto Georg yielded. In after days he complained that he had been carried away by the fervid rhetoric of M. Drakovics and the frenzied enthusiasm of the people ; but he accepted the throne in the excitement of the moment, although with a slight mental reservation respecting the last clause of the Premier's invitation, and the proviso that his election should be approved by the Powers. About this condition there

proved to be little difficulty. The Roumi envoy, who had been on his way to attend Caerleon's coronation when the rebellion broke out, had discreetly remained upon the frontier in order to see to which side victory would ultimately incline, and the Premier hastened to obtain his good offices as an intermediary with Czari-grad. M. Drakovics had already closed the post-offices throughout the country in the name of the public safety, and forbidden the issue of passports to foreign newspaper correspondents, so that Thracian affairs were enveloped in the most profound mystery, while secret messages flashed about among the Powers. Prince Otto Georg's elevation to the throne seemed to commend itself to every one as an excellent solution of the Thracian difficulty. Pannonia and the house of Schwarzwald-Molzau welcomed the election as a set-off to the rebuff sustained by their joint diplomacy in the matter of Princess Ottile's marriage, while the authorities of Prince Otto's own country were not sorry to find in it a way of escape from the intricate international questions involved in his unauthorised connection with the suppression of the revolt. Even Scythia, whether because she judged it well to remain for a time in the background after the failure of the conspiracy, or because, having given in her approval to Prince Otto Georg's candidature two years ago, she considered that it would appear inconsistent to draw back now, offered no objection to his accepting the crown, while bright visions of a Scythian princess seated beside him on the Thracian throne at some future date began to float before the eyes of the Pavelsburg authorities. M. Drakovics hurried back to Bellaviste in triumph, and the new King was crowned the very next day, with the regalia prepared for his murdered predecessor. The

palace was still filled with the traces of the devastating fight which had been waged within its walls, and the chapel of St Peter itself had not escaped scathless, while the people who looked on at the ceremony had scarcely a cheer to spare for their new sovereign, since their thoughts were all with Carlino. But as though to give point to the words with which M. Drakovics had ushered in the new reign, the guns which announced the accession of King Otto Georg thundered forth also the knell of the traitors who had conspired against Caerleon.

CHAPTER XXII.

A KING WITHOUT A CROWN.

BANISHED from Scythia, Princess Soudaroff and Nadia turned their faces southwards, and after a hurried winter journey across Central Europe and a more leisurely one through Spain, found themselves at Cadiz and on board the yacht Anna Karénina. The Princess had acted with her usual impulsiveness in deciding on the way in which she would spend her winter, and she was a little startled when she found herself in command of a ship, the crew of which, with one exception, was entirely English. She had no experience of yachting whatever, and her ignorance made her fall an easy prey to the captain, an ancient mariner endowed with as many wiles as those popularly attributed to the heathen Chinee. Like his late Majesty King George III., however, this gentleman "gloried in the name of Briton," and considered that all foreigners were constitutionally afflicted with a more or less mild form of insanity. It was both right and advisable to humour their fancies, especially when they were sufficiently wealthy to hire a large yacht for the winter; but it was also necessary to guide them gently in the direction in which they ought to go, and to restrain their

natural eccentricities by the moral influence of a stronger mind.

On the very day that the Princess first came on board, the captain asserted his independence by refusing to receive his orders through the courier, a useful and important individual whom Prince Soudaroff had chosen to accompany the ladies on their travels, and protect them from extortion by the way, since if he did cheat them right and left himself he would take good care that no one else should have the opportunity of doing so. The Princess, in her kindness of heart, recognised at once that it was only natural that the captain should dislike to take orders from Alessandro, and accorded him the privilege of seeing her whenever he found it necessary, thus yielding herself as a helpless slave to a most unbending autocrat. Not that Captain Binks was rude or overbearing—far from it. The commander of a Cunarder could not have been more accommodating and urbane; but it was evident that he must know more about the winds and currents and shoals of the Mediterranean than his employer, and when some conjunction of these natural objects interfered to prevent anything that the Princess was anxious to do, it certainly could not be considered the fault of Captain Binks. This being the case, it was not, perhaps, a just punishment which overtook the old sailor when, after a short cruise in which he had regulated the ladies' trips on shore in regular man-of-war fashion, the yacht was run into by a lumbering collier as she lay at anchor outside the Grand Harbour of Valetta on the night after arriving in sight of Malta. It had been Captain Binks's intention to take the Anna Karénina into the harbour by daylight, thereby exhibiting to all and sundry both her beauties and his

own seamanship, and then to grant the Princess the day in which to make her pilgrimage to St Paul's Bay and back while he took stores on board; but now the spars and bulwarks were so much damaged as to render necessary a stay of a week or more in the island.

It must be confessed that this accident gave keen pleasure to Nadia, who was not a favourite with Captain Binks; but the Princess failed to perceive either his uplifting or his fall, for she was absorbed, as usual, in schemes of kindness for the benefit of those about her. She was acquainted with the histories of all the crew by this time, knew how many children each man had, and who had aged parents to support, and it was her delight to write letters home for them in her formal foreign hand with its queer twirls and flourishes, while Nadia, longing to be of some use or help to some one, stood shyly aloof, and wondered how her godmother managed to take so much interest in the affairs of all these strangers. In one of the Princess's pleasures, however, Nadia's interest was as deep as that of her godmother, for the person involved had been connected with herself at one of the crises of her life. It was on the day that they sailed from Cadiz, before they had been on board more than a few hours, that the Princess came into Nadia's cabin with a face radiant with delight.

"Who do you think is the carpenter on this ship, my child?" she asked.

"I don't know, Marraine," said Nadia, looking up puzzled. "Some relation of the English coachman you had once?"

"No; it is not an Englishman—it is a Scythian." "One of our own people? or a Bibelist? The

Oudenist cabinetmaker you visited in the hospital, perhaps?"

"Dear child, no. But it is a person of whom you have often heard—Yegor Popoff, my poor Katinka's husband."

"Oh, Marraine! How did he get here?"

"When he left Katinka, he went to Pavelsburg to look for work, and made a voyage to Sweden as ship's carpenter. At Bergen he heard that my friend Feodor Petrovitch, to whom this yacht belongs, was in the harbour looking out for a carpenter, as the one he had brought from England had died, and he obtained the post. And now, without our knowing it, he was waiting at Cadiz, and we, without his knowing it, were bringing Katinka to him. Do you see now why we were driven out of Scythia, my child?"

"I see," said Nadia. "But what are you going to do? Have you said anything?"

"Said anything?" cried the Princess. "My dear child, I have said everything! I sent for Yegor to come to me in the saloon, and I have spoken to him very seriously. I told him how wrong and foolish he had been in doubting Katinka and in listening to Anna at all, and much more so in running away as he did. He saw it all for himself—in fact, nothing but pride had kept him from coming back and telling her so. He was waiting for her to write first, when she did not know where he was! I think I made him thoroughly ashamed of himself. When I saw that he was really sorry, I slipped out and fetched Katinka. *She* was ready enough to forgive, poor child! and I left them together. What a happy beginning for our voyage, is it not?"

Nadia acquiesced, and a new hope rose suddenly

in her own heart. Could this voyage be destined to bring Caerleon and herself together, as it had already united Yegor and Katinka ? The same thought had occurred to the maid, who came shyly to tell her that she and Yegor were praying that she might be as happy as they were. They did not know her story ; but Katinka guessed at it, and found it easy to fill up the details from imagination. Her sympathy contributed still further to raise Nadia's spirits, and perhaps to bring her into the somewhat uncharitable frame of mind in which she welcomed the discomfiture of Captain Binks. In any case, she submitted cheerfully to the necessary detention at Valetta, in spite of the desolate aspect of the dried-up town, with its huge fortifications and flat-roofed white houses, and was indefatigable in helping the Princess to render habitable the enormous rooms, stone-floored and scantily furnished, in which they took up their abode while the repairs to the yacht were pending.

Here it was that two days later they heard the news of the rebellion in Thracia—news which sent all the special correspondents who keep portmanteaus ready packed, in case of a sudden summons, to the Balkans at racing speed. Carlino was dethroned, Peter was restored, Bellaviste was in the hands of the Franzist party,—this was what the telegram, despatched by M. Sertchaeff and his brother the General, told the world, and after its contents had been made public there was silence for several days. What those days of waiting were to Nadia it is impossible to describe. As is always the case when no authoritative news can be obtained, the most sensational rumours were rife—all, of course, founded on “private messages of undoubted trustworthiness,” or on the utterances of “a person

who was better acquainted with the east of Europe than any other man living." The purveyors of news of this description were largely concerned with the fate of Caerleon, and his supposed adventures formed the universal subject of conversation in Valetta society. There was not an Englishman in the island that did not admire the way in which he had stuck to his kingdom, although there were some who objected to his having gone to Thracia at all, and many were the conjectures, each backed by the authority of some newspaper statement or other, as to what had become of him. He had yielded to the demands of the rebels without striking a blow; he had refused to abdicate until a pistol was held to his head; he had offered such a strenuous resistance that he had been vanquished only when severely wounded; he was now imprisoned in one of the underground galleries of the Bellaviste fortifications; he had entered the service of King Peter; he had disappeared mysteriously; he had blown out his brains; he had been murdered;—the variety and mutual inconsistency of the rumours bore reliable testimony to one point only, the impenetrable mystery that shrouded his fate. It seemed certain that he was not at large, or why was he making no effort to regain his throne? but it seemed certain also that the victory of the insurgents had not been so complete as was at first reported, or why did they not send for King Peter?

That easy-going gentleman was still at Nice, apparently caring very little whether he was restored to his kingdom or not, and professing to have no more certain knowledge than any one else whether Thracia was in a state of civil war or had submitted calmly to the new order of things. Meanwhile the Thracian border was beset by hordes of eager journalists, each

man anxious to obtain for his own paper the first authentic news, and all alike refused an entrance into the kingdom. One or two, more enterprising than their fellows, succeeded in crossing the frontier at some unguarded point; but they were detected and seized before they had got a mile nearer the capital, and after a few hours' detention in a police-station to cool their ardour, were escorted over the border again without gaining any information beyond a further addition to the stock of rumours.

At last a definite piece of news made its way to the frontier, and remained uncontradicted. M. Drakovics, still strong in the possession of office, was at Tatarjé, and was engaged in conference with the envoy from Roum, while negotiations were being carried on with the various Powers. The next day the embargo on special correspondents was removed, and the long-tried newspaper men rushed across the frontier, and raced one another to Bellaviste. The '*Empire City Crier*' only missed gaining the earliest details through an unfortunate accident which befell the cart in which its representative was being conveyed at break-neck speed across country; but as it was, the correspondent of the '*Fleet Street*' took the first place, with the unconquerable Mr Hicks as a good second. After them came the representatives of numberless other journals, and Europe was speedily deluged with full, true, and particular accounts of the origin, progress, and extinction of the revolt.

The news reached Malta in time for publication in the morning papers. Ever since the first tidings of the outbreak had arrived, the Princess and Nadia had heard nothing discussed, whether in public or in private, but the "*Thracian business*," with all the gruesome de-

tails which the hopes or fears or imaginations of different people had grafted on to the truth. The long uncertainty had made the girl sick with fear. She was almost driven to feel that it would have been less painful to hear once for all that Caerleon was dead than to have absolutely no idea as to what had become of him. On this particular morning she was crouching in one of the windows of the great bare drawing-room, afraid to go out lest she should hear the question of Caerleon's fate discussed once again, but knowing that she could not refrain from listening to the conjectures which tormented her, when the Princess was summoned to an interview with Captain Binks. Breakfast was only just over; but the autocrat of the Anna Karénina resembled time and tide in that he waited for no man, and he wanted the Princess's authority for some item of the repairs to the yacht. The formality, which was naturally of a purely ceremonial character, having been gone through, Captain Binks was about to depart, when the Princess caught sight of a newspaper sticking out of his pocket.

"Is that to-day's paper?" she asked, moved by a sudden impulse of alarm for which there appeared no special reason.

"Yes, your Highness. Sad business this about Thracia. I wish I had the men that murdered that poor fellow aboard of my ship. There would be no yard-arms to let when I'd done with 'em."

"Murdered?" said the Princess, with sinking heart.
"Please let me see."

Captain Binks smoothed out the crumpled sheet and handed it to her, and she read the account, telegraphed in the first instance from Bellaviste to London, over a hastily repaired wire, by the correspondent of the

'Fleet Street,' of the recapture of the city, of Louis O'Malachy's confession, and of Prince Otto Georg's election to the vacant throne. As she read it she resolved instantly that Nadia should hear nothing of the news until the report was confirmed.

"Thank you, my good captain," she said, handing the paper back to its owner. "It is indeed terrible! Will you have the goodness to send Alessandro to me as you go out?"

Captain Binks departed, somewhat disappointed by the indifference with which the Princess had received the news, and which he attributed to the fact of her being a foreigner, and she hastily laid her plans while waiting for the courier to appear. The account in the newspaper had mentioned the presence of Mr Hicks in Bellaviste, apropos of the accident which had delayed his arrival there, and the Princess had a certain amount of acquaintance with Mr Hicks. He had been sent on a journalistic mission to Scythia some time ago, charged to ascertain the real facts as to the persecution of the Evangelicals, rumours of which had reached America, and he had gone to the fountainhead, and had interviewed Count Wratisloff and herself. When Alessandro entered the room she directed him to procure a carriage for the whole day, and intrusted him also with a telegram to be despatched immediately, addressed to Mr Hicks at Bellaviste, and inquiring whether the reports which had reached Malta of recent events in Thracia were trustworthy. Alessandro was relieved of his usual duty of accompanying the carriage, and ordered to wait at the house and bring the return telegram to his mistress as soon as it arrived. Having made these arrangements, the Princess went in search of Nadia, whom she found still curled up on the stone window-seat.

"I have ordered the carriage to take us to Il Boschetto this morning, my child," she said, briskly. "We will spend the day there, and come back in the evening. It will be a pleasant change, and you will like to see the orange-groves."

"Yes, Marraine," assented Nadia, without showing much interest in the prospect. "I suppose there is not likely to be any news before we get back—genuine news, I mean?"

"If there is, it shall be brought out to us," said the Princess. "You may be sure of that, dear child."

Somewhat comforted, Nadia went to her room to prepare for the drive; but her godmother did not breathe freely until they were safely outside the gates of the city and well on their way. At any moment, while they were in the house, some acquaintance might come in, and enter upon the one absorbing topic of conversation. But it was too early as yet for most of the Valetta ladies to be out, while the gentlemen were still busy in office or orderly-room, and all was safe when once the white city on its steep hill had been left behind, and the long country drive begun. Bare little fields with stone walls enclosing them, without a tree or a bush to break the monotony, interspersed with small houses like square stone boxes, windowless and chimneyless, lay on either side of the road. After driving some distance, they came in sight of Città Vecchia. Here there is a grotto which is said to have been at one time the abode of St Paul; but the Princess thought that its genuineness was too problematical for it to call for a visit, and the city was left on one side, in spite of the remonstrances of the driver of the carriage.

Il Boschetto was reached after a further drive—a

pleasant oasis of gardens and orange-groves in the midst of the surrounding desolation, and the northern eyes of the Princess and Nadia rejoiced in the luxuriant greenness. The place was a favourite one for picnics; but it happened that there were no other visitors that day, and they had the gardens to themselves. After lunch the Princess suggested a rest in the shade; but Nadia could not sit still, and preferred to walk on by herself and obtain a view of the sea from a hill near at hand. She had been gone some time, and the Princess was becoming a little drowsy, when the sound of footsteps roused her to full consciousness, and she saw Alessandro coming towards her with a telegram in his hand. Taking it from him, she turned back among the trees and tore it open:—

“Too true that King Carlino was murdered at outbreak of revolt. Prince Otto Georg of Schwarzwald-Molzau is to be crowned King to-day.”

“This poor Carlino!” broke from the Princess. “And my poor child! how shall I tell her?”

“Marraine,” said the panting voice of Nadia behind her, “wasn’t that Alessandro I saw from the hill-top just now? It looked like him, and he seemed to be coming here. Did he bring any news?”

The Princess turned quickly, guilty and tongue-tied, crumpling the telegram in her hand. Nadia caught sight of it, and knew at once what it was.

“Marraine, you have had news of Carlino!” she cried, snatching the paper from her godmother’s reluctant hand and reading it. The moment that the words had met her eyes she dropped it with a groan.

"He is dead, and I have killed him!" she cried.

"Killed him? But you did not kill him, my child," said the Princess.

"Yes, I did; I urged him to accept the crown, I wouldn't let him abdicate when he wished to do it. I made him stay in Thracia, and I have killed him. It is my doing."

"It is God's will, dear child. You may have been the instrument——"

"I was," said Nadia, in the same hard voice. "You told me that I had been doing wrong the night I came to Pavelsburg, and now this has happened to make me sure of it. It is all through me. Don't speak to me, Marraine. No doubt it is well that I should see what harm my wanting my own way can do. But why should he be punished for what was my fault?"

She stood looking away through the trees with stony eyes that saw nothing, and the Princess laid her hand on her arm and guided her gently back to the carriage. When they reached it, Alessandro came bustling up to express a hope that the telegram had not contained any bad news, but Nadia neither saw nor heard him. As they left the gardens behind them, she sat looking out over the arid landscape, refusing to listen to the Princess's attempts to comfort her.

"Please don't speak to me just now, Marraine. Let me get used to the thought," she said at last, and her godmother desisted with a sigh from her well-meant efforts. They had passed Città Vecchia before the Princess spoke again; and this time she did not address Nadia, but seeing two weary-looking men toiling along the road a short distance in front of the carriage, she called to Alessandro, who was riding behind—

"Tell the driver to stop when we come up to those

men, Alessandro. They look tired, and we might drive them into Valetta."

Alessandro obeyed in silence, for he was becoming accustomed to his mistress's eccentricities, but with a slight grimace.

"Vill your 'ighness zat I speak to zem ?" he asked, as the carriage stopped.

"No," said the Princess, "I will invite them myself. This one does not look like a Maltese. I will try him in English. My poor man, I fear you are in some distress. Can we help you in any way ?"

The second wayfarer, a Maltese peasant in the ordinary dusty cotton clothes and Phrygian cap, stared in surprise and utter lack of comprehension at the lady ; but the one whom the Princess had addressed came forward respectfully, touching the place where the brim of his hat would naturally have been, if he had worn one. He was an undersized, light-haired man, haggard and unshaven, and clad in what looked like the tattered remains of a suit of livery of some kind.

"I'm sure you're very good, ma'am," he said. "If you would be so kind as tell me the word for 'doctor' in this chap's lingo, and 'ow to find one in the town yonder when we gets to it, me and my master would be no end obliged to you."

"Your master is ill — hurt ?" asked the Princess. "You have been shipwrecked with him, perhaps ?"

"No, ma'am ; we ain't been shipwrecked," returned the man, politely but repressively. "I 'ope as you'll excuse me sayin' any more, for my master is a very well-known gentleman ; but bein' in difficulties just now, so to speak, 'e tell me not to mention 'is name. But we want a doctor badly, and as we couldn't make out these fellers, nor them us, 'is Maj—— I mean my

master, said as me and this chap 'ad better go on to the town there, and see where we was. We've tried 'em in English and in French and in Thracian——” he broke off suddenly, and stared at Nadia, whose attention had been caught by the last word, and who had turned and was regarding him fixedly.

“It is you, is it, Wright?” she said, with listless indifference. “Then you forsook him too?”

“Me forsook 'is Majesty, miss?” cried Wright, much injured. “Not until 'e tell me to. Would you 'ave me say, ‘Go yourself,’ when 'e sent me for the doctor?”

“*He sent you?*” Nadia almost screamed. “When? Where?”

“About 'alf a hour ago, miss; from this chap's farm-'ouse over there.”

“Then he is alive? They didn't kill him? Tell me quickly, or I shall go mad. He is there, you say?”

“Why, yes, miss,” said Wright, stolidly, trying to disentangle the sheaf of questions which Nadia poured upon him in her agitation. “'E's there, of course—leastways, I left 'im there, and it stands to reason as 'e ain't dead.”

“Oh, Marraine!” sobbed Nadia, burying her face on the Princess's shoulder, “do you hear? He's alive, he's alive!”

“Compose yourself, my child,” said the Princess, although Wright's wooden face showed no sign of his having observed the girl's excitement. “Who is this worthy man? Tell me.”

“He is the King's groom, the man who brought me to meet Marie Karlovna. Oh, Marraine, he isn't dead!”

“My good man,” said the Princess, abandoning the attempt to reduce Nadia to reason, and addressing

Wright, "get into the carriage, and we will return to find your master, and drive him to Valetta."

"Not with you, ma'am," said Wright, in horror. "It ain't my place at no time, and now—" he looked at his disreputable clothes with disgust. "If I might ride on the box this little way, and get down before comin' into the town, so as not to disgrace you—"

"Your companion will sit on the box, and show the driver the way to his farm," said the Princess. "Tell him so, Alessandro. Now, my good man, if you wish to be of assistance to your master, you will do as I tell you."

Thus adjured, Wright obeyed in much confusion, and took the seat opposite the Princess, making himself as small as possible, and with great delicacy keeping his face turned from Nadia, who was leaning back in her place, holding her parasol so as to shield her from observation, and crying quietly for joy.

"Now tell me," said the Princess, when the carriage had turned and they were driving in the direction of the farm, "is it the King who is ill?"

"No, ma'am; it's 'is brother, Prince Cyril. 'E's always been sickly, and me and 'is Majesty think as the cold 'as got to 'is chest. 'E was moanin' awful when I come away."

"Poor boy!" said the Princess. "And what did the King propose to do when he reached the town?"

"I don't rightly know, ma'am, seein' as 'e's precious 'ard up. We didn't 'ave no money with us when we was took, except a copper or two as I 'ad in my pockets, and 'is Majesty ain't quite sure what 'e can lay 'is 'and on 'ere. You see, the British Government, they didn't like 'is takin' the kingdom on, and 'e don't know that 'e mightn't be took up if 'e showed 'imself. That's

why I didn't tell you 'is name until I see Miss O'Malachy."

"I see," said the Princess, beckoning to Alessandro, who rode up, and received his mistress's orders to return to Valetta and prepare some of the unused rooms at her lodgings, and to secure the services of a doctor, all without making any fuss, or saying who the new visitors were. He departed at once, and the Princess began to inquire into Cyril's symptoms, a subject which lasted Wright until the carriage arrived at the farm. The peasant descended from the box and led the way into the little courtyard with its high stone walls and one tree, while two or three women and a number of children peered shyly at the ladies from the shelter of the outbuildings. Wright went straight into the house, and with an innate dramatic instinct, the existence of which had hitherto been unsuspected in him, announced merely—

"There's two ladies 'ere, your Majesty, with a carriage, as will be pleased to give you and 'is 'ighness a lift into the city."

"Ladies!" Nadia heard Caerleon remark, in tones of dismay; but catching sight of their shadows behind Wright, he took his courage in both hands and came towards them. There is a popular superstition, which is an article of faith with some people, that a gentleman looks like a gentleman under any circumstances. Perhaps Caerleon was the exception which is said to prove the rule—at any rate, wearing neither coat nor waistcoat, and not having had the opportunity of washing or shaving for several days, he presented the appearance of an unusually powerful ruffian with whom trade had not prospered of late.

"I am most grateful for your kindness," he said,

coming to the door and bowing to the Princess ; " but I could not think of trespassing upon it by accepting your offer. The fact is, we are not exactly in trim for ladies"— Nadia ! " he seized her hand in both his, and stood gazing at her, forgetful alike of the Princess and of what he had been saying, until Nadia, feeling herself growing crimson under the look in his eyes, drew her hand away and retreated behind the Princess.

" My child, you are acquainted with this gentleman, I think ? " murmured her godmother reprovingly ; and Nadia came forward again for an instant and said in confusion—

" The King of Thracia—Princess Soudaroff," and retired in greater confusion still, feeling that it was indeed the most unkindest cut of all that she should be the first to remind him of his altered estate, by presenting him to the Princess instead of the Princess to him. But her godmother was already crossing the room towards Cyril, who was lying moaning and only half-conscious on a bed of maize-leaves in a corner.

" I am afraid he is very ill," said the Princess aside to Caerleon, " and he certainly cannot be nursed here. We must take him to Valetta in my carriage immediately, and there is a room in my lodgings where he can be well looked after, and you will be safe at the same time."

" Oh, really," began Caerleon, " I don't know how to thank you enough ; but I can't saddle you with all the bother of an invalid in this way."

" Of course not," said the Princess ; " I saddle myself with him. I have the room, and he needs it. Besides, you are friends of my dear child's, so that I cannot count you as strangers, though I hope I should do the same if you were."

"I have seen my godmother bring home a dying beggar from the roadside, in a most dreadful state, and have him nursed and cared for," said Nadia, reassuringly. The comparison suggested was not a particularly happy one; but her intention was so kind that Caerleon felt ashamed of the twinkle in his eye as he glanced at her, and hoped she had not seen it.

"See," said the Princess, "we will get into the carriage, and you and your servant shall carry your brother to it. Then we will make room for you too, and the groom shall go on the box. Stay," and she drew him aside and put her purse into his hand, "you will wish to reward these honest people who have given you shelter, and you can repay me afterwards, when you have been able to make arrangements."

"You are too good, Princess," said Caerleon, gratefully; and he remunerated the farmer and his family for their kindness in a way that left them calling down blessings on his head. Then he and Wright carried Cyril to the carriage, where the Princess and Nadia had been arranging the cushions as comfortably as they could for him, and when he had been propped up safely, they were able to leave the farm on the way back to Valetta. There was little opportunity for conversation during the drive, for Cyril was restless and uneasy, and turned continually from Nadia to his brother in weary bewilderment, relapsing now and then into moaning unconsciousness, so that every one was glad when the city was reached. It was now dusk, and the friendly twilight prevented the Princess's strange companions from being noticed in their passage through the streets and their entrance into the house. Alessandro had done his work well. The doctor was in attendance, and Cyril was speedily relegated to a comfortable bed, and

delivered over to the care of an elderly woman, the widow of a martyred Bibelist, whom the Princess had brought with her on her travels as Nadia's maid. The doctor said that cold and exposure had brought on an attack of pleurisy, but he hoped that it might not prove very serious ; and Caerleon, much relieved by the verdict, gave himself up to the tender mercies of Alessandro, who provided suitable clothes in a marvellous manner, and sent him down in proper trim, an hour later, to dine with the ladies. He was warmly welcomed by the Princess, who had found all her kindness of heart necessary hitherto to help her to conceal the dismay she had felt at his appearance, and who positively beamed upon the transformation effected by Alessandro.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNDER WHICH KING?

"YOUR Majesty will relate to us your adventures?" said the Princess, when they were seated at table. "At present we know only that the insurgents declared most solemnly that they had killed you, and that we find you are here in Malta several days after your supposed death."

"I can't at all understand that confession myself," said Caerleon, smiling, "for the men who made it had the best possible means of knowing what had really happened to us. Well, to go back to the beginning of everything, it seems, from what my brother has since told me, that he and Drakovics had some idea that an attempt would be made on my life at the coronation, which was to take place to-day—or yesterday—or was it the day before?—I am in a state of utter confusion now as to the day of the week. I suppose the rumour was a mere blind, intended to distract our attention from the real plot. At any rate, rather less than a week ago, Wright woke us in the middle of the night, and told us there was not a sentry to be seen about the place, and that the servants had all disappeared. We got up and looked for our revolvers, but they had been

tampered with, and the only weapons we could find were the wretched Brummagem swords we wear in full dress. We started out along the corridor with these in our hands, but it wasn't until we came to the landing that we caught sight of the enemy. Then we had a fight on the stair-way, like old Umslopo-gaas, and we were led forcibly to the conclusion that a Zulu battle-axe was a more satisfactory weapon than a tailor-made sword. Still, with General Sertchaieff's sword, which Wright got hold of for me, I think we might have managed to hold our own, if they hadn't come upon us from behind and knocked us down the stairs. Then they tied us up with curtain-ropes, and wanted me to sign a deed of abdication, but I wouldn't do it."

"I am sure you would not!" cried Nadia, with flashing eyes. "Did they threaten to kill you?"

"Well, the atmosphere was rather threatening, certainly, and they were kind enough to warn us that our fate was in our own hands, and that sort of thing. Then they took us down to the river, and on board a steamer, and there, I don't mind telling you, I did think that our last hour was come. They blindfolded us, and I made sure we were to be shot at once; but then they began to drag us along the deck, and I thought they must be going to make us walk the plank, that there might be no signs of violence visible on our bodies. I know it crossed my mind even then that they must have a robust faith in human nature if they believed that three bound and blindfolded corpses would be imagined to have got into the river by accident. At last I felt them give me a good push forwards, but instead of falling overboard I found myself on my hands and knees in a cabin. The next moment my brother and

Wright were flung in on top of me, and the door was locked. I believe they never really meant to kill us after all, only to frighten us into begging for mercy, or something of the kind; but if that was the case, they were disappointed. Before we had picked ourselves up we heard the men who had brought us on board putting off again in the boat, and the steamer started immediately. They must have been getting up steam beforehand in readiness for our arrival. We set to work at once to try and free ourselves, and as our hands were tied in front of us, we managed to do it after a time. Wright succeeded first, and he helped us. Then we got off the handkerchiefs which were tied over our eyes, but the place was quite dark. We felt all round and about it, and made up our minds that we must be in some sort of deck-cabin, but there were no windows, only wooden shutters. There was no furniture, nothing but a heap of old tarpaulins, and it was frightfully cold, for the snow was on the ground when we started. Cyril hadn't got a proper coat on, merely a smoking-jacket, and he began to shiver horribly. I had no coat either, but Wright gave him his, and we took turns in walking about so as to keep warm, and covering ourselves as best we could with the tarpaulin. If you asked me how long we stayed in that place, I should say about six hundred years, but I suppose it can't have been more than six days,—or was it only five? A grinning Scythian rascal with a lantern opened the door and poked us in some ship's biscuit and water several times during our voyage. I really never knew before how old and stale ship's biscuit could be. We tried to induce the fellow to bring us some better food for Cyril and a blanket or two; but we had no money with us, and he demanded cash down,

and exhibited a holy horror of dealing on credit. Cyril got worse and worse, and we couldn't do anything for him. We gave him all the tarpaulin to keep him warm, but it was wretched stiff stuff, and wouldn't cover him properly. At first he was able to talk sensibly to us, and to try to appeal to the jailer's better nature in Scythian, but as time went on he became half-delirious, and we could see that he was suffering horribly. We banged at the door and did everything we could devise to attract attention, and we promised the jailer unheard-of sums if he would bring the captain or some one in authority to speak to us, but he only laughed. All this time we could tell that the ship was moving, but happily there was not much sea on. At last, this morning, she stopped suddenly, and as far as we could make out, a boat came on board, and then put off again. Whether this was an order for some change in our destination I don't know, but not very long afterwards they called to us to come out of the cabin. Wright and I dragged Cyril up, and helped him out into a sort of passage-place, where the light dazzled us, for we had seen nothing but the jailer's lantern since we had been on board. Before we could look round or manage to see who was there, we were blindfolded again and our hands tied, and we were taken down the ship's side into a boat. We were rowed some way until we felt the keel grate on some sort of shore, and then they hauled us out and dumped us down upon the sand, and we heard them rowing away again. Our hands were tied behind us this time, so that it was a long while before we could get them free, and when we got our eyes uncovered, the ship was steaming away from us right out at sea,

almost out of sight. There we were stranded, on a desert island for all we knew, with poor old Cyril gabbling away in all sorts of languages, and quite off his head. We drew him under the shadow of the cliff, and Wright went a little way along the beach to look for a path. He found a place where there was a gap in the cliffs, and went up it a short distance, and then came back and told me that he could see houses a good way off. We lifted poor Cyril between us, and carried him up through the gap and along a little field-path to the house where you found us. There were only the women and children at home, and they couldn't understand us, nor we them ; but they were very kind to us, and gave us food and made up a bed of leaves for Cyril. Then when the farmer came back from work, we had another try at making ourselves understood ; but it was no good, and we couldn't even get him to tell us slowly where we were. He talked so fast, and said so much, that though I had an idea that he mentioned Valetta, I couldn't be sure of it. However, I thought it was very likely that they had brought us to Malta as the nearest piece of British territory to Thracia, so Wright and I agreed that he had better get the farmer to take him to the town we could see in the distance, and look about for some good Samaritan who could speak English, and might be able to guide him to a doctor. But I never hoped to fall in with two such good Samaritans as those who brought him back."

"Hush!" said the Princess, "let us have no compliments, please. To have been the means of helping fellow-creatures in distress is enough for me, and if it is not enough for Mdlle. O'Malachy, she may say so for herself. But tell me—do you seriously consider that you are in danger here?"

"I haven't an idea," said Caerleon. "The English Government has never recognised me as King of Thracia, and therefore it has no right to consider me as anything but a private person; but there might be some official who would prefer security to logic, and put me in prison just to prevent any risk of accidents. I must telegraph to Drakovics to-morrow, and see how things stand, and after I have heard from him I shall know better what to do."

"Quite so," said the Princess. "You are aware that the Thracians, believing you to be dead, have chosen one of the Schwarzwald-Molzau princes as their king?"

"I know—Prince Otto Georg, a very good fellow; he was staying with me at Bellaviste before I—well, left. I have no wish whatever to interfere with his election,—though no doubt it will be an awful sell for him when he hears that I am alive after all."

"I doubt whether you could interfere even if you were anxious to do so," said the Princess. "We heard that he was to be crowned to-day, and it is possible that his coronation might bar any claim on your part."

"I shan't be sorry," said Caerleon. "It seems to me that this would end a very difficult situation in a very desirable way. It certainly looks as though my captors were of your opinion. If that boat this morning brought the news of Otto Georg's coronation to the men who had me in charge, it appears that they considered me no longer dangerous. Otherwise they might have marooned us somewhere along the North African coast, where there would have been very little chance of our ever turning up again to trouble them, or if they were particular about British territory, they could have found one or two rather nasty places on the shores of Cyprus."

"But you are the King still," said Nadia, with fierce eagerness.

"I really don't know, and I can't say that I care very much if I am not. It has not been such a delightful post as to make me want to turn the other man out of it if he likes it. And if I am not king I must surely be a very harmless individual, who might safely be left in peace."

"Yes," said the Princess, "and yet it might be supposed that you had come here for the purpose of setting on foot a plot for your own restoration. I will tell you what I will do. We have not yet attended one of the Governor's receptions, but I brought with me a letter of introduction to him, and I will deliver it to-morrow morning. I will represent your situation to him in his private capacity, and if as Governor he considers it his duty to arrest you, he will give me some hint of his intention, and you shall take refuge on board the Anna Karénina, and leave the port. Under the Scythian flag you will be safe."

"This is the irony of fate," said Caerleon. "Scythia has turned me out of Thracia, and now she is to protect me against the lawful authorities of my own country."

"Then you believe that the plot against you was of Scythian origin?" asked the Princess. Caerleon reflected for a moment before answering.

"I do not think that there were any Scythians among the actual plotters," he said; "but I feel pretty sure that they would never have entered into the conspiracy if they had not felt sure of Scythia's support in case of success, and her sympathy if they failed. I think it's quite possible, too, that she strained a point in granting the exiles permission first to settle in her territory, and then to leave it."

"But who were the leaders of the conspiracy?" asked Nadia, suddenly.

"Well, I saw most of General Sertchajeff; but I hear that his brother, the former Premier, was in it too."

"Yes, I saw their names; but that is not what I mean. Was my brother there?"

"There were a good many of them altogether," said Caerleon, evasively.

"Was Louis there?" she persisted.

"Well—yes, he was," admitted Caerleon.

"You need not be afraid of hurting my feelings," said Nadia, her eyes gleaming ominously. "He has no special tenderness for me—he would have shot me once if another man had not knocked his hand up just in time, so don't try to spare him."

"My child," said the Princess, "do not say what you may afterwards regret. Your unhappy brother is dead."

"Dead?" said Nadia, awed. "Was he killed in the fighting?"

"No," said the Princess, "afterwards. Do you wish to leave us, my child? His Majesty will be so kind as to excuse you," and Nadia rose and left the room.

"What became of Louis O'Malachy?" asked Caerleon, returning to his place after opening the door for her. "All that I know about the outbreak is what I heard from your man just now, and he did not mention his name."

"He was to be shot this morning with General Sertchajeff and others among the rebels who had belonged to the army," said the Princess.

"I can't say that I don't think his fate was well deserved," said Caerleon, hotly. "When I remember the way in which that fellow deceived us all—pretending that he had given up his commission in the Scythian

army for the sake of throwing in his lot with Thracia, and how he took the oaths to me, and received the pay of our Government while all the time he was plotting against it—I feel as though shooting was too good for him. But that's not all," he rose from his seat and began to walk up and down the room. "As Miss O'Malachy says, when she came to Bellaviste to warn me that her father meant to murder me, he actually fired at her—would have killed her rather than allow her to betray his secret. There are some things one feels it very hard to forgive a man, though he is dead."

"It is cases of this kind," said the Princess, with apparent irrelevance, "that make one wish that Scripture and reason allowed us to believe in the efficacy of prayers for the dead."

"It is, indeed," Caerleon assented heartily, although wondering a little at the turn the conversation was taking. But when the Princess spoke next, she had changed the subject again.

"My poor Nadia is very much alone in the world," she remarked. "Now that her father has cast her off, she has really no relations left."

"Is the O'Malachy acting the Roman father?" asked Caerleon. "I was surprised that he took no part in the rebellion."

"He has been laid up with a bad attack of gout at a little town in Scythian Sarmatia," said the Princess, "and no doubt his illness has saved his life. He must have heard from his son the reason for the failure of the plot which you mention, for Nadia has received a long letter from him, containing the promise of his dying curse, and declaring that from thenceforward she was no daughter of his."

"She could have worse spared a better father," said Caerleon.

The Princess smiled. "That is exactly my idea. No doubt it is selfish of me, but I cannot but rejoice that Colonel O'Malachy has cast her off so unequivocally. When she came to me first, as a little child, I was always afraid that a day would come when her parents would claim her again, and, as you know, they did."

"And I'm afraid that I can't say I'm sorry for it," said Caerleon. "It was to my advantage, you see, for if Miss O'Malachy had remained in Scythia with your Highness, I might never have met her—nor yourself, madame," he added, hastily.

"I did not know that Englishmen were so fond of paying compliments," said the Princess, looking surprised. "However, as I was about to remark, it is a great happiness to me to know that my god-daughter is altogether mine from henceforth."

"I—I'm afraid you don't quite understand what I wanted to say," said Caerleon, desperately. "I don't know whether she has told you, but it doesn't seem right for me to be staying in your house without your knowing it—I mean that I have twice asked Miss O'Malachy to marry me."

"You are candid," said the Princess, smiling. "Nadia has told me of your obliging offer, I assure you. May I ask whether this plain speaking is intended as a prelude to a third proposal?"

"I wish it might be! But that must depend upon circumstances."

"I see. Your Majesty is a prudent lover."

"But you don't see what I mean," persisted Caerleon. "I can't be certain until I know whether I am still King of Thracia or not."

"Then you consider that Nadia is good enough to be your wife, but not to be your queen?"

"I think she is fit for any throne on earth," said Caerleon, indignantly. "Your Highness seems determined to misunderstand me. It is not my fault that Nadia—I beg your pardon, Miss O'Malachy—is not Queen of Thracia at this moment; but she would not have me when I was King, and yet she wouldn't allow me to abdicate. She put me on my honour to stay in Thracia until I was turned out, and refused to have anything to say to me as long as I stayed there. Of course I see the difficulties in the way. Her Scythian blood, and her name, would make the people detest the marriage at first, even now, especially after what has just happened, and Drakovics would oppose it violently, and he is capable of a good deal. But time works wonders, and if she would have given me a grain of hope, I would have waited any number of years; but she wouldn't, and therefore your Highness can't wonder that I shall be glad if Prince Otto Georg is left in peaceable possession of the throne."

"This is a declaration of war, then? If you find yourself once more a private individual, you will again ask Nadia to marry you, and do your best to deprive me of my child?"

"Like a shot," returned Caerleon, promptly. "I am sorry if you think I am ungrateful, but I thought it only fair to tell you the state of the case."

"You are right. I prefer an open enemy. Now, I can see that all your fatigues and anxieties have left you very tired, and no wonder. Don't let me keep you up if you would rather go to your room at once. I hope the servants have made you comfortable?"

"Perfectly, thank you. But I am going to sit up and look after my brother."

"Are you?" asked the Princess. "I think not. I lay my commands upon you to leave him to-night to my care and Tatiana's, while you take a good rest. If you wish to please me (and you know that I am a very important person to please if you want to marry Nadia) you will do as I tell you."

"How can I thank you for all your kindness?" asked Caerleon, gratefully, but she stopped him at once.

"By saying nothing about it. Good night."

"I don't think she is really as angry with me for wanting to marry Nadia as she seemed to be just now," was Caerleon's reflection as he kissed her hand, while the Princess was congratulating herself that she had at least shown him plainly that he need not contemplate marrying Nadia out of pity, nor imagine that she had no friends.

The next day opened brightly for the fugitives from Thracia. In the first place, Tatiana announced that she thought Cyril seemed a shade better. Next, Wright won a victory which filled his soul with delight. Entering his master's dressing-room before he was up, he discovered Alessandro and an aiding and abetting boy engaged in putting out the clothes which they had procured for Caerleon to wear. In the present state of affairs, Wright looked upon this duty as his own, and after the employment of much broken English and many Italian gestures on the side of the two foreigners, and much silent contempt on his part, he ousted his rivals and remained master of the situation. Lastly, the Princess interviewed the Governor at an absurdly early hour, and found him in a most reasonable frame

of mind. Truth to tell, when his Excellency heard that Princess Soudaroff wished to see him on urgent private business, his thoughts flew immediately to Captain Binks, whose tyranny, owing to his own boastful spirit, had become a joke in the town. As a man of honour, the Governor was rejoiced to welcome the opportunity of delivering this harmless and excellent foreign lady from her oppressor, and accorded her an interview at once. His amazement, when he found that she had come to inquire his opinion as to the personality of the reigning King of Thracia, and not to ask his advice as to the best way in which to get rid of the captain of her yacht, was extreme, but he was quite ready to help her. He had not a doubt that Prince Otto Georg would immediately be recognised as King by the Powers, and in that case Caerleon could probably count on being left unmolested, unless he took to devising plots against the new *régime* in Thracia. At any rate, if orders for his arrest should be sent from England, his Excellency would contrive that the Princess should hear of the mandate by a side wind before it could be carried out.

This was the news which the Princess imparted to Caerleon when he appeared, much ashamed of having overslept himself, at the late breakfast. The intelligence, following on his conversation with her the night before, served to raise his spirits considerably, and he went so far as to chaff her gently on the subject of the exactions of Captain Binks, of which he had heard from Wright, much to her amusement, while Nadia listened in silence, pleased at his cheerfulness, but still puzzled by it. After breakfast, nothing would satisfy him but to go out at once and despatch his telegrams to King Otto Georg and M. Drakovics. He felt himself a free

man once more, but he was feverishly anxious to have the charter of his liberty signed and sealed. It was only as he enjoyed the unwonted sensation of filling in the telegraph-forms that he realised what a relief it was not to find himself waylaid during his walk to the post-office by half-a-dozen broken-hearted officials, all beseeching him, reverentially and almost with tears, not to give himself the trouble of writing out his messages with his own hand. As he left the building he made an eager mental calculation of the time which must necessarily elapse before he could receive his assurance of release from Bellaviste, and rejoiced to discover that a few hours ought to be sufficient to end his suspense. It was not only that he was desirous to escape from the trammels of etiquette—he had endured them for the past three months, and could manage to endure them again, he thought, if it would do any human being any earthly good,—but there was Nadia. He could not help knowing that she had been glad to see him again the night before; she had allowed him to hold her hand, and her beautiful eyes had been full of tears when they fell before his,—and yet, if he was King of Thracia still, she would persist in maintaining the barrier which she had erected between them. If it was his duty to go back to Thracia and take up the weary round again without the support of her companionship, he would do it, doggedly if not with a good grace; but if things had been settled otherwise without any action on his part, how gladly would he hail the release! He was fully convinced by this time that he was not suited to be a king—the position demanded mental and moral (or perhaps unmoral) qualifications of which he was not possessed, and a quiet life in England with Nadia was more than ever his ideal of

happiness. He walked back to the house as though he had been treading on air, and was greeted by a friendly smile from Alessandro, who had washed his hands of Wright, but still retained a proprietary interest in Wright's master, and took occasion to inform him that the doctor had arrived some time ago to pay his morning visit to Cyril. Almost before the courier had finished speaking, Caerleon caught sight of Nadia standing on the piazza and apparently waiting for him. He ran up the steps at once.

"I have just been telegraphing my congratulations to the new King," he said, "and assuring him that I had far rather he was on the throne than I. I feel like a schoolboy out for a holiday."

"Oh, hush!" said Nadia, gravely. "I have bad news for you. The doctor is here, and he says that your brother is decidedly worse."

Caerleon gazed at her in astonishment. "But I thought he was so much better!" he cried.

"That was only a temporary improvement, attributable to the greater comfort of his surroundings," she answered, quoting the medical pronouncement word for word. "The doctor hoped that the pain would decrease a good deal in the night; but it is worse, and he is afraid he will be obliged to perform an operation."

With a muttered apology, Caerleon hurried past her, and hastened up-stairs to Cyril's room, meeting the doctor on the way, and hearing the unfavourable verdict confirmed. The patient's state was critical, and the remedies which had been applied seemed to have failed of their effect. Everything depended now on constant care and attention, and this the Princess and her household might be relied upon to furnish. But such a transference of responsibility could not

satisfy Caerleon. He insisted on taking his share, and much more than his share, of the nursing, and would never have quitted his brother's room if he had not been compelled to do so. The Princess and the doctor between them hunted him out for a walk twice a-day, and obliged him to take his meals in an adjoining room, but except during these short intervals he insisted on remaining with Cyril. The telegram which reached him from M. Drakovics, inquiring anxiously what course he intended to pursue with regard to Thracia, and that from King Otto Georg, offering to resign the kingdom to him at once, were read and answered by the patient's bedside, and forgotten as soon as they had been disposed of, in the all-absorbing interest of the struggle between life and death. The Princess was surprised and touched by the devotion of the elder brother to the younger, but Nadia read Caerleon's feelings more clearly. He was indignant with himself for acquiescing so easily in the cheerful view at first taken of Cyril's state, and for allowing his mind to turn to considerations respecting his own love and happiness when the brother who had come to Thracia for his sake, who had done his best to keep him on his unstable throne, and who was suffering even now through his misfortune, was too much prostrated by pain and weakness even to realise the gravity of his own condition. To devote himself now altogether to Cyril, and to atone for his past neglect by cutting himself off almost entirely from Nadia's society, was his first impulse, but Nadia only admired him the more on this very account, for in a similar case her own instinct would have been to do exactly the same. As it was, she stifled a sigh over the memories of that first evening and morning, when

Caerleon had seemed so happy and had talked so cheerfully as to recall the first days of her acquaintance with him, and turned heroically to taking her share of the nursing, or to doing what she could towards leaving her godmother free to devote herself to the invalid.

"What an ungrateful wretch I am!" she said to herself. "A week ago it would have seemed to me the very height of happiness merely to know that Carlino was alive, and yet now that he is in the same house, and I see him every day, I am not content. Can it be that I am jealous of poor Lord Cyril? It sounds dreadful, and yet, when I see that Carlino is always thinking about him, and never speaks to me unless he is obliged, it makes me miserable. And I ought to be glad to be able to do anything for Lord Cyril, and so I am,—only I am glad that I forgave him before I knew how hard it would be."

Another thing that made the time she spent in nursing Cyril more than ordinarily hard for Nadia was the fact that her presence always seemed to exert on the patient an influence the reverse of soothing. Whether it was that her anxious, painstaking ways irritated him, or that his conscience pricked him with regard to her, did not appear, but his fevered eyes followed her persistently about the room, and seemed to be addressing some entreaty to her. The doctor noticed it at last.

"He has something on his mind," he said to Caerleon. "Has anything occurred to trouble him, do you know?"

"Nothing but our leaving Thracia, so far as I am aware."

"He did not leave any young lady behind him there, of whom Miss O'Malachy may remind him, did he?"

"Oh no. He's not that sort of fellow at all," responded Caerleon, with absolute assurance. But no other suggestion presented itself to his mind, and he found himself puzzling continually over the uneasiness Cyril showed in Nadia's presence. Could it be that for some reason she was vaguely connected in his mind with her brother? Nadia herself could offer no explanation but this, and the discovery of the real cause of Cyril's aversion to her surprised her almost as much as it did Caerleon. She was left in charge of the patient one day, while Caerleon ate his lunch in the dressing-room, and he was astonished after a time to hear the sounds of an altercation from the sick-room,—if that could be called an altercation in which all the speaking was on one side.

"Is he delirious?" he asked, opening the door slightly.
"Can I help you?"

"Oh, do go away," said Nadia, her face flushed and angry. "No, it's too late; he has heard your voice. I think he must be delirious."

"But what is it? Does he want anything?"

"He wants me to tell you something, and I won't. There is no reason why I should, and it can't do any good."

"But how do you know that is what is troubling him?"

"It struck me suddenly that he wanted something, and I asked him all the things I could think of, until it flashed upon me that it was this, and I have told him I can't do it, and he won't be satisfied."

"Can't you tell me, just to quiet his mind? I will never think of it again, but this excitement must be very bad for him." He glanced at Cyril, who was straining his ears to catch their low-toned conversation.

"No; I can't. He has no right to ask it of me, nor have you. It is merely a thing between him and me, and it would make no difference if I told it to you, except that you would think worse of him. I say to him that he must tell you about it himself if he wants you to know it."

"How can he, when he hasn't strength to utter a word?" asked Caerleon, indignant at what seemed her unkindness. "Come, I must insist on your telling me. Do you know that this anxiety is the worst possible thing for him? You cannot refuse to ease his mind."

"You care a great deal more for his feelings than you do for mine!" cried Nadia, angrily.

"If you really believe that, I must bear it, I suppose. Kindly tell me this mystery."

"It is merely that he came to see me at Bellaviste, some days before the great ball, and got me to promise that I would not marry you if you asked me. That's all. And it made no difference whatever. I would never have married you under any circumstances."

And launching this Parthian arrow at him, she retreated defiantly, leaving him stupefied. He remembered how Cyril had offered to help him in his suit, had arranged for him a meeting with Nadia, had contrived to keep M. Drakovics from suspecting what was going on,—and all the time he had been playing this double game. Now he was lying helpless, gazing with anxious eyes at his brother, and awaiting his reception of the news. With those eyes upon him, Caerleon could not hesitate.

"It's all right, old man," he said, with something like a groan; "she says herself that it made no difference, you see."

Whether Cyril accepted the forgiveness with less

difficulty than it was offered, or whether it was that his act of treachery did not loom so large in his eyes as in his brother's, certain it is that he seemed to begin to mend from that time. The doctor commented on the improvement in his condition, and opined that the load on his mind had been removed, and Caerleon, although conscious that it had merely been transferred to his own, agreed with him. It was fortunate for the ex-King that public affairs were now once more of a character to engross his mind, for side by side with the realisation of Cyril's perfidy came the knowledge that Nadia was most grievously offended with him, and that she ignored him resolutely whenever they met. But it was high time that the affairs of Thracia should be settled on a definite basis, and two delegates, one the president of the Legislative Assembly, the other M. Drakovics's chief supporter in the Ministry, were about to visit Malta for the purpose of opening negotiations with Caerleon, since the Premier himself dared not leave the kingdom at this juncture. A very short conference with their late sovereign convinced the ambassadors that they were not likely to meet with any opposition on his part to the established state of things. To King Otto Georg's offer to abdicate he had from the first returned an unqualified refusal, and he scouted even the idea of retiring into private life on his laurels and a pension, as his predecessor had done. His reign of three months had been merely an interlude in his life, he said, although a most picturesque and stirring one, and he was quite content to return to England as poor as he had left it now that peace and liberty were so happily secured to Thracia. The news of this noble self-abnegation was duly telegraphed to Bellaviste, and rehearsed to the Assembly by M. Drakovics, who was

overcome by emotion during the delivery of his speech, although not to such an extent as to be unable to cope with the business side of the question. It was immediately arranged to give legal effect to the renunciation by drawing up a document renouncing all claims to the Thracian throne, to be taken to Malta with all possible speed, and there signed by Caerleon and Cyril. To Caerleon the signing of this document was a formal release from his fetters, and when he was informed that the commissioners had brought it to the house, and were awaiting his presence, he so far forgot the dignity of his late position as to whistle while he hurried down-stairs. But before he could enter the drawing-room Nadia came flying along the lofty stone passage, and forgetting her displeasure of the past week, caught his arm.

"Don't sign it," she gasped. "You are the true King."

"But I have no objection whatever to signing it," he replied.

"Oh, don't say that!" she entreated. "Don't forsake your work. There was so much to be done, and you were sent there to do it."

"Perhaps," said Caerleon, "and I was ready to stay on there as long as I was wanted. I was not anxious to leave Bellaviste—in fact, I objected most strongly to doing so; I had no hand in announcing my own death, nor in getting King Otto Georg crowned, but all these things happened, and it is pretty clear to me that any work that is to be done is left for other people."

"But you must not leave it," she cried. "Oh, why won't you listen to me?"

"Isn't that rather hard, when I have always obeyed you so implicitly? I don't deny that if you would have

listened to me at Bellaviste on a certain evening, Thracia would not have appeared quite such a howling wilderness as it did latterly. But after all, that was not the cause of my leaving, and I would not go back there now, even if you refused to have anything more to say to me unless I did.'

"You have no right whatever to suggest such a thing," said Nadia, with great dignity.

"Quite so; I haven't. But I know very well that I am not going back on the old footing, which I suppose you intended should continue? I thought so. It seems to me that you are making the choice a very easy one. But I beg your pardon for teasing you. The fact is, that I am not going to plunge Thracia, and perhaps Europe, into bloodshed to gratify my personal ambition—or even yours for me. King Otto Georg is liked by the people and acceptable to the Powers, whereas my return would be the signal for revolution, perhaps for a European war. That risk I will not incur, even to please you."

"I never thought you were a coward!" she cried, bitterly. Caerleon looked down at her with a smile which he could not repress.

"I wonder whether it has ever occurred to you what a very queer girl you are?" he said. For the moment he thought that Nadia would have struck him.

"How dare you say that to me?" she cried, and rushed away.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE KING HAS HIS OWN.

"CAN you spare me a minute or two, Princess?" asked Caerleon, coming into the cool and shaded drawing-room, where his hostess sat writing a circular letter to her band of Bible-women at Pavelsburg.

"I will spare you any number of minutes—half an hour if you like," returned the Princess, with a smile. "Sit down here," and she pointed to a low chair beside her.

"Cyril and I have been talking over our plans," Caerleon went on, but she interrupted him impulsively.

"I hope you did not decide to adopt any of them, then, for I have one to suggest. The doctor recommends a sea-voyage for your brother, and I have been looking forward to your coming with us for a cruise in the Anna Karénina."

"You are much too kind," said Caerleon. "After the shameful way in which we have been imposing upon your good nature all these weeks, we really can't quarter ourselves upon you any longer. Now that Cyril is well enough to travel, we ought to be looking out for some place of our own."

"But what will you do?" asked the Princess. "You

would not return to England now—in February? It would be fatal. And if you were travelling about on the Continent, your brother could not be properly looked after. Oh, I know that you and your good Wright would take every care of him, but it would not be the care which a woman gives—which we have been giving him."

"I should think not," said Caerleon. "We could never aspire to approach you in that. But—you will excuse my saying it—I don't think my presence on board your yacht would meet with Miss O'Malachy's approval."

"What!" cried the Princess, with astonishing duplicity, "am I to understand that Miss O'Malachy has been making herself disagreeable to my guests, in my house?"

"Good gracious! I shall get the poor girl into trouble," was Caerleon's instant reflection. Aloud he added hastily, "Not at all, I assure you. It was merely a fancy of mine that she might not care for me as a fellow-passenger."

"Then I trust that it will remain a fancy. I should be very seriously displeased if Miss O'Malachy forgot herself in such an extraordinary way. But perhaps you do not wish to leave Malta at present?"

"It's the very thing I do wish," cried Caerleon. The leaders of Valetta society had shown a tendency to lionise him of late, and an enterprising newspaper man had come out from England expressly to interview him. "I am absolutely yearning to get away."

"Then come with us," said the Princess. "Come as a favour to me. I am really afraid of the captain of my yacht, and all my friends here tell me that I ought to get rid of him. He seems to have been boasting to

his acquaintances in the harbour that he can make me do as he likes. There is no harm in that, so long as he does not make me do anything wrong, but it was unnecessary to publish abroad the fact. I will not discharge him, for I have no fault to find with him professionally, and it is only reasonable to suppose that he must know more about the sea than I. But still, I do not care that he should regulate all my movements, and I have been looking to you to protect me against him."

"Oh, if I can be of any use——"

"Then it is settled. You are coming with us. And now, I want your help at once. Captain Binks informed me this morning that if I had any intention of continuing my voyage at all, this was the time for visiting the *Ægean*. Just to prove to him that I am a free agent, can you suggest any cruising-ground that is not the *Ægean*?"

"Let me see. You are in search of the places visited by St Paul, are you not? Well, you know, there is the other Malta—the other Melita, I mean—up somewhere in the Adriatic, off the Austrian coast." Caerleon spoke from a somewhat hazy recollection of long-past discussions which had enlivened various Greek Testament classes in his college days. "I believe the theory that it is the real Melita is quite exploded, but you are not bound to concur with the critics without seeing the place for yourself. It would be fairly new ground, and you could touch at the Ionian Islands on the way."

"Excellent!" cried the Princess, clapping her hands. "I think we shall astonish Captain Binks."

So much astonished, indeed, was the worthy man when he realised that his employer had taken matters into her own hands, and chosen a course for herself without consulting him, that he forgot to make his

usual objections until it was too late to urge them with any hope of success, and when he did so, the Princess merely referred him to Caerleon.

"Lord Caerleon suggested this trip," she said, "and if there are any difficulties, he will know how to meet them. He is a gentleman of great experience, my good captain."

To the surprise of every one Captain Binks surrendered at discretion. It was only fitting that he should take the lead when the other person concerned was a woman and a foreigner; but when there was an English gentleman on board the captain knew his place. The Princess's mild suggestions he had regarded as eccentricities, to be nipped in the bud for fear of disaster, while he would have welcomed the wildest proposals Caerleon had cared to make as oracular utterances to be obeyed literally for the honour of the British flag.

Under these happy auspices the voyage began, and the greatest harmony prevailed among the passengers on board the Anna Karénina, with one unfortunate exception. Captain Binks might defer humbly to Caerleon, the Princess might honour him with her fullest confidence, but Nadia would not so much as speak a civil word to him. In the circumscribed surroundings of the yacht she could not succeed in ignoring him altogether, but she could and did cavil at everything that he said, and lost no opportunity of making cutting remarks at his expense. The most trying part of it was that, as in the case of a certain historic curse, no one seemed at all affected by what she said, and least of all the person most concerned. When she was cherishing a lively indignation against Caerleon on high moral grounds, and was determined to prove to him how thoroughly she despised and detested his conduct, it was

melancholy and even irritating to find that her disapproval had no more effect upon him than rain upon the plumage of the proverbial duck, and that when she had exhausted herself in a tempest of indignation he was willing to return to the charge unruffled as soon as she liked. To tell the truth, her behaviour puzzled him not a little; but he had no mind to lose an hour of Nadia's society now that it was possible to enjoy it, and submitted with perfect good humour to hearing all his actions criticised and his most innocent remarks railed at.

Matters reached their worst point on the day that the Anna Karénina visited Ithaca. It verged a little upon the commonplace, no doubt, but still it was only natural that Caerleon should fall into the snare of making the inevitable comparison between the characters of Penelope and Ulysses as he stood on deck beside Nadia and watched the island fade from sight, but it was distinctly unfortunate that having said so much, he did not stop there.

"But nowadays," he went on, "we have changed it all. Penelope goes out into the world, and has her fling, or her *Wanderjahr*, whatever that may be, and Ulysses stays in Ithaca, and keeps the home together until it pleases her to come back."

"Did you intend that comparison to apply to me?" demanded Nadia, standing on the defensive at once.

"No, really. It didn't strike me that there was any resemblance. Do you see one?"

"If you didn't mean it, why did you say it?"

"I assure you that there was not the slightest personal allusion intended. It was a most innocent remark, made merely for the sake of conversation."

"Pray don't trouble yourself to make conversation for my benefit. I should have thought you would see by this time that your efforts were not appreciated."

She walked away, and about an hour passed before Caerleon came upon her again, sitting in a basket-chair near the companion. His evil genius prompted him immediately to cross the deck to her side, and say—"Shall we resume our argument, Miss O'Malachy? I don't think we finished it."

"I do not wish to talk about nothing," she returned; "and when I have anything to say to you, I will say it."

"This sounds alarming. Do you mean that I am forbidden to speak to you unless I am first addressed?"

"I mean," she said passionately, but in a low voice, "that I wish I might never have to speak to you again."

Caerleon looked at her in utter bewilderment, not believing that she could be serious. "In the old days you would have apologised to me as soon as you had said that," he said, trying to treat the speech as a joke. But she rose and looked him in the face.

"I wish I had never seen you," she said. "This last month has been the most miserable time of my life."

"What have I done?" asked Caerleon of himself helplessly, as she turned and went below. "Have I teased her too much? But no—she could never have meant all the things she has said, and she couldn't expect me to think she did. I don't know what to do."

She did not appear in the saloon again that evening, and he sat through dinner gloomy and conscience-stricken. The Princess had letters to write when the meal was over, and Caerleon and Cyril went on deck

for their usual constitutional. Cyril broke the silence first, as they tramped steadily and soundlessly backwards and forwards.

"I say, old man," he began, with some hesitation, "excuse my asking, but how long are you going to let that girl treat you in this way?"

"In what way?" inquired Caerleon, too much relieved at finding some one with whom he might discuss his perplexities to feel angry at his brother's interference.

"Why, the way she goes on from morning to night, slanging you all day long, and snapping your head off if you open your mouth! She's making you the laughing-stock of the ship. When you come on deck together the men begin to grin." This was a slight exercise of the imagination on Cyril's part, although it was true that he had seen Captain Binks close his left eye on one occasion in a way that expressed unutterable things, intending the action for the benefit of Wright, who ignored it loftily.

"Well," said Caerleon, "it pleases her—at least, I suppose it does, or I don't see why she should do it—and it doesn't hurt me much. But what makes her so angry with me I can't tell."

"I can. It's her belief that you're laughing at her."

"But that's absurd."

"No, it isn't. She thinks you don't take her seriously, and the modern woman must be taken seriously, or die."

"But Nadia is not a modern woman," said Caerleon, placidly.

"Oh, I know she is a cross between a Puritan and an early Christian; but even those excellent people would have turned rusty if they had thought they were being

humbugged. And she is in deadly earnest, and you do nothing but rag her."

"Not intentionally, on my word and honour. But what am I to do? I can never manage to hit on the right thing to say. How did you learn to understand women, Cyril?"

"I didn't learn, it is a gift—improved by cultivation, of course. You will never have it, old man," Cyril dropped into Nadia's chair as he spoke, and Caerleon leaned against the bulwark opposite him; "but if I may venture on one small bit of advice, do make an effort to understand the woman you want to marry."

"I've done that until my brain is softening. If she wasn't so utterly truthful and transparent, so that one knows she means everything she says——"

"Oh, you ridiculous idiot!" cried Cyril. "Then why do you stay to be slanged?"

"Because I hope all the time that she doesn't mean it."

"There you are! I tell you, Caerleon, that unfortunate girl is pretty nearly desperate. Do you think she talks to you in this way out of pure cussedness, or for fun? She has raged at you for a fortnight, and you laugh at her the whole time."

"But if she has anything against me, why in the world doesn't she tell me so plainly, and let us have it out once for all?"

"Your reasoning would be most cogent if you were only speaking of a man, but lovely woman has her own ways of doing things. And when you come to think of it, you would be rather startled if the lady in the present case marched up to you some morning and informed you that you had offended her grievously, giving details, of course, and added that all intimate

relations between you would be suspended until you had purged your contempt. That is the actual state of things, of course, but Miss O'Malachy is not going to tell you so. She has let you see it pretty plainly, and I'm not surprised that she is in despair over your denseness. The most maddening thing you can do to a woman is to ignore her moods, and when she is in love with you——! I tell you it wouldn't astonish me in the least if she left the ship at the next port we come to, and tried to lose herself. Another woman would throw herself overboard, but she is not that sort. The Princess's teaching does not produce suicides."

Caerleon's face was very pale. "For heaven's sake, Cyril, stop talking in that way, and tell me what you think I ought to do. It's no use trying to appeal to her feelings, for I've done it, and she simply scathed me."

"Listen," said Cyril, sitting up in order to give greater effect to his words. "You must lay aside that contented, don't-care manner of yours. It maddens her. I know you do care, and with some women your manner would answer admirably, but she can't see through it. Look here; I know you will naturally feel shy of taking my advice after that business at Bellaviste, but this is a straight tip——"

Caerleon started. "I was not thinking of that," he said.

"Well, you don't imagine that it is very agreeable to me to remind you of it, do you? I felt that I had to let you know of it when I was so bad, but I've been glad enough since that you seemed ready to forget it. Now, old man, if you have forgiven me, take my advice in this. I give you my word that I'm trying to do my level best for you and her. Turn rusty yourself. Let

her see that she has gone too far. If she tries to begin rating you, give it her back——”

“I can’t. You seem to forget that she’s a woman, and that I care for her.”

“Yes, you can; if it’s for her own sake. Don’t you see, it will show her that you are in earnest? Once she knows that she has made you really angry, she will be ready to do anything she can to appease you. Matters must come to a crisis then. Try to make yourself feel that she isn’t treating you fairly. She has no business to inflict on an innocent inexperienced fellow like you the punishment which would be all very well for a hardened old offender, such as your humble servant. Yes, that’s your line. Get up a feeling of indignation. Lay it on hot and strong. Provoke an explosion, or you’ll never get the chance of an explanation.”

“Well, I will try. Anything’s better than the way we have been going on lately. But suppose it doesn’t succeed?”

“It must, unless you are too late already; but you will have to be on the look-out for the slightest change in her manner. Don’t lose your chance, or you’ll blame yourself for it all your life. Now I’m going below to turn in.”

He disappeared, but Caerleon remained long on deck, meditating on what he had said. As it happened, the Princess also was moved just at this time to take some notice of the state of affairs, and the next morning she said suddenly to Nadia—

“Have you quarrelled with Carlino, my child? You do not seem to be on good terms with him.”

“He cares nothing for what I say or do,” responded Nadia, sullenly.

"Is there any encouragement for him to care, dear child? What has he done that you should treat him as you do?"

"He has disappointed me, Marraine. I thought he was brave, that he could be trusted, and he has abandoned his work, and betrayed his trust. He sneers at the mere idea of honour."

"My child, you astonish me!" cried the Princess. "Are you certain of this? To make such accusations without proof is cruel."

"I know it by what he has said to me himself, Marraine. I had not spoken to him for a week, but I laid aside my anger and implored him to be firm, to do his duty,—and he laughed at me."

"I am certain you are making a mistake, Nadia," said her godmother, with most unusual decision. "You have judged hastily and harshly, and you are wronging an excellent man. You should cultivate more faith in your fellow-creatures, and especially in your lover. Are you the only person in the world that can possibly be in the right? Allow Carlino to possess a conscience as well as yourself, I entreat you. You have been very hard upon him, and I feel that I must give you a warning. Am I to understand that for a whole month you have been cherishing these angry feelings against him, without even doing him the courtesy of asking whether you understood him rightly on the occasion to which you refer? You would not have treated your worst enemy in this way at one time. You may have misunderstood him; you may have refused to listen to what he had to say. Give him the chance of explaining the reasons for his action, and don't press him too far. No man will put up with such treatment for ever."

"I want to make him care," said Nadia, with fierce

determination, and she went on deck, stifling in her heart the Princess's warnings and the answering echo of her own conscience, which told her that the real reason for her quarrel with Caerleon was that he had disappointed her ambitious dreams for him. Emerging from the companion, she found the subject of her thoughts examining the distant coast-line with the aid of a glass borrowed from Captain Binks. Ordinarily he would have turned at once to greet her, and offered her the telescope, but now he took no notice of her approach.

"Is that island very interesting?" she inquired, sarcastically.

He did not answer, and she repeated the question with a little added sarcasm.

"I beg your pardon," he replied, coldly. "Were you speaking to me? I understood that I was not to be favoured with your conversation in future."

This was unexpected. Nadia looked at him in surprise, unaware that he was congratulating himself on the way in which she had addressed him. If there had been the slightest sign of softening in her manner, he could not have followed Cyril's advice.

"And you are satisfied that it should be so?" she asked, in blank dismay.

"If it satisfies you. What pleases you must always please me," he said, politely, and then folded up the telescope and walked away, leaving her suddenly conscious that the deck was very wide and bare, and that she was very lonely and desperately miserable. At breakfast he ignored her in the most pointed way, answering briefly and repressively when she addressed him, but confining his own conversation exclusively to the Princess and Cyril. It was one of the hardest

things he had ever done in his life, to keep up this pretence of coldness when he found Nadia's beautiful eyes scanning his face timidly from time to time ; but the remembrance of Cyril's words the night before armed him with a determination not to yield until he had gained his point. Accordingly, he held aloof from the ladies all the morning, chatting with Captain Binks upon the bridge, and Cyril, who was reading aloud to the Princess as she worked, observed with satisfaction that Nadia's needle made no progress, and that the reluctant tears dropped slowly on the stuff which she was supposed to be forming into a garment.

"She is thoroughly frightened at last," he said to himself. "After all, it's just as well that Caerleon should have given her her head so freely hitherto. It makes the sudden pull-up all the more effective. Now, if I can manage it, he shall get things settled this afternoon, for he will never be able to go on with this."

Pity for the desolate Nadia was making itself felt even by the business-like Cyril ; but pity itself could not induce him to relax one whit of his precautions for securing a happy ending to Caerleon's wooing. When they landed that afternoon on a small island, inhabited only by a few fishermen and goatherds, he sent his brother to walk with the Princess, and to carry the stock of Gospels and picture-tracts which she always distributed at the huts they visited, while he himself, on the plea of weakness, followed slowly with Nadia. When the Princess and Caerleon emerged from the little church on the hill-top, whither the village priest had taken them to look at the ancient *icons* and service-books, they found him waiting for them outside alone.

"Miss O'Malachy was tired, and I left her to rest on the way up," he said. "Caerleon, don't you think it

would be a delicate attention if you went and offered her your arm? Give me the Princess's books, and we will try and establish communications with the old pope here."

Very willingly Caerleon left his brother talking to the priest in a wonderful medley of dialects, and began to descend the path by which they had come up the hill. A bare-footed little girl herding goats was the only person he saw until he came upon Nadia, sitting upon a stone, with her face buried in her hands.

"Can I—can I do anything for you, Miss O'Malley?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"Yes—you can go away," she returned, fiercely, without looking up, but the tears were forcing themselves through her fingers, and she began to sob in a hopeless way that went to Caerleon's heart. He stood looking at her, without an idea what to do, until she rose suddenly.

"If you will not go away, I must," she said in her most dogged tone, dashing away her tears, but for once Caerleon saw his opportunity and grasped it.

"No, you will not," he said, barring her path. "We must have an explanation, Nadia. I want to know what you mean by treating me in this way?"

"In what way?" It was evident that this carrying of the war into her own territories took Nadia by surprise.

"Why, the way you have behaved to me ever since we came on board,—rating me all day long, and treating me as if I was the dust under your feet."

"It has not done you much harm. I wish it had." and her grey eyes flashed stormily.

"How do you know whether it has or not? Do you think I am going to beg for mercy from a girl who

doesn't mind what she says to me, and rather likes to make me a public spectacle, because she knows that I care for her too much to say anything in return? No; the fact is, Nadia," he stopped her indignant denial, "that you have been taking a mean advantage of me. You treat me like a dog because you know that I love you, and would rather have you scolding me all day than be King of Thracia."

"At least avoid that subject," said Nadia, with a sudden shiver. "But no, as you say, it may be better to come to an explanation. How can you expect me to have anything to do with you when I know that you gave up your work like a coward that you might be able to marry me?"

"I promise you I didn't," cried Caerleon.

"You almost told me so. At any rate, you did not deny it."

"I didn't know that you expected me to state everything in plain English, but I will. You know how I hated Bellaviste; but still, if King Otto Georg had not been elected and crowned in my place, or if it had been possible for the Powers to object to him more strongly than they did to me, I would have gone back, and stayed there until I was kicked out again. But as I said to you a month ago, I was not going to risk causing another revolution and a European war, even for your sake. That is my position exactly, and I have told you all about it already. It's very hard, to be sure, that one's motives are altogether pure; but I honestly believe that I did not allow the thought of marrying you to weigh with me in making my decision. You must trust me a little, Nadia."

"But you said—you said that I was making your choice an easy one, when I said I wouldn't marry you

if you went back. If you thought I would marry you in case you gave up the kingdom for my sake, you were mistaken. What have you to say now?"

"Simply this, that my resolution was taken before you spoke to me that day at all. If I had felt it right to go back, I hope I should have gone, and done my duty to the best of my power; but I felt that it was neither right nor desirable. It is unfortunate for me, from your point of view, that duty and pleasure both pointed the same way in this case, but I can't help it. I can only give you my word. If you will accept that, it's all right, but if not—— Well, it's for you to decide."

"To decide what?" asked Nadia, sharply.

"The question I have asked you once or twice already. I could not expect you to marry me if you didn't believe my word."

"I do believe your word," said Nadia. "No, don't touch me," drawing herself away from him as he took a step forward, "that is not the question to be decided. You know what I am—you have seen during this last month how truly hateful I can be when I take a thing into my head; you see that I was not even ready to trust you, after all that you have done. And I can't promise to be any better—a little time ago I thought that I should never be unreasonable and foolish again, and now I have been worse than ever. Why don't you say that you have been mistaken in me, and let us part? I know I have deserved it—I will never utter a word against you if you decide that this time I have tried even your patience too far. What do you say?"

"This," replied Caerleon, promptly, taking her hands in his and kissing her. "Why do you want me to punish myself?"

"Don't—please don't," cried Nadia, bursting into

tears again. "You don't know all the wicked things I have thought. I believed that you had been consulting Lord Cyril about the kingdom, and that he had advised you to do just as you liked, and not care whether it was right or wrong. I know he doesn't like me, and I thought he would be glad to get you to do anything that I wanted you not to do. I meant to refuse you again, even if it broke my heart."

"And I haven't a doubt you'd have done it," said Caerleon, "but you are a little hard on Cyril. It is due to him that we have had this explanation at all, for he told me he was sure that there was something that came between us, and advised me to speak to you. And you do believe me now, dear, don't you?"

"Indeed I do," said Nadia, smiling through her tears, "and I hope you will always be my friend; but I am not going to marry you. I am such a wretch. I shall make your life miserable."

"Are you going to start with that determination?" asked Caerleon, "because it would be rude of me to say that you couldn't make me miserable if you tried. But if you are only judging from past experience—well, I have been making you cry just now, but I hope I shan't be such a brute as to do it again. We must both turn over a new leaf."

"At any rate," said Nadia, with tremendous resolution, "I know what I shall do. I will make it a matter of conscience always to obey any order or suggestion of yours without the slightest hesitation. It only makes trouble when I try to settle things for myself."

"What!" cried Caerleon, stepping back a pace and looking at her in consternation, "do you intend to use me as a means of self-discipline? I can't stand that. And who talks about *orders*? You certainly have a

most unflattering opinion of me, Nadia. Am I such a tyrant as all that? Haven't I made you understand yet that what made me take to you at the very first was that you looked at things so differently from myself? I want you to differ from me. I want you to criticise my plans, to show me where I am wrong, to tell me how everything strikes you. Then we can thresh the matter out together, and decide it by our joint wisdom. But tell me, do you really look upon me as such a fearful despot?"

"It's not that," said Nadia, slowly. "It is only that I feel I ought to obey you—that I should like it—because you are so good, and I have treated you so badly, and—"

But her further reasons for obedience cannot be known, for Caerleon interrupted her suddenly and forcibly, and it was some little time before she freed herself and spoke again.

"But would you really like me to marry you, Carlinno?" She brought out the name with an effort, and yet from her lips it sounded like a caress. "I have thought lately that you must certainly have left off caring for me."

"Did you really think that? What have I been doing? You didn't believe that I could possibly give you up? Won't you ever trust me, Nadia? I do entreat you, the next time you have anything against me, let us have it out at once. Don't accuse me in your mind for weeks without my knowing it, and take everything I say and do as a sign of guilt. It's not fair. Only come and tell me what it is that you don't like, and give me a chance of explaining things. You will have a lot of trouble with me, my darling, for I'm such a stupid fellow that I can't see a thing unless it's plainly

pointed out to me, but I will do my best to look at things from your point of view. I do want to make you happy."

"A little time ago," said Nadia, meditatively, "I should have said 'I want to try to help you to be good,' but I know better now. I want you to help me."

"Oh, that's absurd," cried Caerleon. "You will have to educate me up to your level, you know. Don't be too hard on me, dearest. I'm only an ordinary man, and I haven't been practising martyrdom from my youth up, as you have. Let me off easily in the way of hurting my feelings, and that sort of thing, just at first. By the bye, why did you send me that cruel message through Cyril the time you came to Bellaviste?"

"Because I was sure that I could not hold out if you came and spoke to me yourself. I would have given worlds to stretch out my hands and call to you to come to me when I saw you standing by the gate, Carlino."

"If you had only yielded to that impulse!" said Caerleon. "Or if you hadn't refused me that night I asked you first to marry me! I am sure that it would have been happier for both of us, dear."

"Not for you," said Nadia, decidedly. "I have learnt one or two lessons since then. But you would in all probability have been King of Thracia still, so that you have to thank me for losing you your kingdom, after all. But there is one thing I want to say now, Carlino, just that you may see that I know all about it, and then we will never mention the subject again. It is about that other girl to whom you were engaged, and who married the Prince of Dardania. I quite understand how it was. It was all my fault, for I made you so angry with me that you took me at my word. You must not think that I am vexed with you about it, for I know that you

were not to blame. I should only have been rightly punished if you had married her. Now please don't let us say anything more about it."

"But I must just say one thing," said Caerleon. "Let me defend myself, for I wasn't quite the mean scoundrel you think me,—getting engaged to one girl simply in order to punish another. Princess Otilie asked me to pretend to be engaged to her just for a fortnight or so, that suspicion might be averted from her real lover, and I was fool enough to do as she asked. She led me a pretty dance. I think even you would have pitied me, Nadia, if you had seen me then. It served me right for being such a fool, but I don't think I was a cad. I never even kissed her."

"If you had, you should never have kissed me," said Nadia, hotly; and Caerleon wondered anew at the intricacies of the feminine mind. "But I am glad you have told me this," she went on, after an interval, "because it makes me more ashamed of myself. When you find me very troublesome and very unbelieving, please whisper in my ear, 'Remember Princess Otilie.'"

"I had rather forget her, myself," said Caerleon; "but I'll do it if you are sure you'll like it. Oh, bother it all! there are the Princess and Cyril going down to the boat. We'll let them get on a little, and catch them up afterwards."

"But the gig was to go to the mainland for the letters," said Nadia, innocently. "Are you not in a hurry to see yours?"

"I had much sooner talk to you. Who knows when I shall find you in this angelic frame of mind again?"

"I knew you could not depend upon me," and the tears began to rise once more in Nadia's eyes. "You can never feel certain that I shall behave properly."

"Oh, what a doubly distilled ass I am!" cried Caerleon. "I wonder whether there ever was a worse fellow for putting his foot in it than I am. My darling, it was a joke. Please do try to expect jokes sometimes, and don't take all I say in earnest. I won't joke more than I can help."

"You must teach me," said Nadia. "If you will explain your jokes at first, I shall soon learn to understand them; and I will try not to be so silly."

To which the infatuated Caerleon replied by declaring that on no account would he have her in the slightest degree different from what she was, and they went down the hill together in great peace and contentment, to find the Princess and Cyril waiting for them at the waterside. Once on board the yacht, Cyril was accommodating enough to occupy himself with his letters, while Caerleon sought an interview with the Princess, and received her warm approval of the engagement. There was no lonely prowl on deck this evening for the two brothers. Muffled in shawls, the Princess and Nadia joined them, and under the lee of the deckhouse they discussed plans for the future.

"I have heard from Mrs Sadleir," said Caerleon, "in answer to a letter I wrote asking her what she thought about my returning home. She advises me not to come back just yet, since the Thracian question is very much in people's minds at present; but after a few months she thinks I may count upon escaping notice. 'Of course,' she says, 'you will not expect to find yourself a *persona gratissima* in exalted circles, nor to receive the offer of the Pavelsburg Embassy when it falls vacant, but I think there is little doubt that you will probably be allowed to grow mangel-wurzels (whatever they may be) on your ancestral acres in peace, and even

to vote in the House of Lords now and then if you do not make yourself too conspicuous.' The next sentence is slightly personal, but I hope you won't mind, Nadia. 'I am all anxiety to know how the romance of the beautiful Scythian girl has ended. If you succeed in winning her and bringing her back with you, give me a week's notice, and I will guarantee that she shall be the greatest social success of these twenty years.' Mrs Sadleir means you to come, be seen, and conquer, Nadia."

"That will not be until some time hence," said the Princess, seeing Nadia look alarmed. "But since you are not to return home for three or four months, Lord Caerleon, I hope we may count upon your society for the rest of our tour. We have still all the coasts of the *Æ*gean and Cyprus to see, and I thought of spending Easter at Jerusalem."

"There is nothing on earth I should like better," said Caerleon, with enthusiasm.

"And you, Lord Cyril?" asked the Princess. "I hope you will come too?"

"You are very kind," said Cyril, speaking with an evident excitement unusual with him, "and I should be most delighted to accept your invitation; but as soon as I am strong again I must set to work. You won't be surprised to hear that this Thracian business has about done for me in the diplomatic service. Of course, if we arranged things nowadays in a common-sense, Elizabethan kind of way, I should be made British agent at Bellaviste immediately, on the score of my intimate acquaintance with the country and the people; but we don't, and I'm afraid there are not many chiefs that would care to have me under them now. I never have felt exactly drawn towards settling

down and cultivating mangel-wurzels, and after the experiences of the last three months such a prospect looks less enticing than ever. This letter here is from King Otto Georg. He wants me to go back to Thracia as his private secretary—the post I held under you, Caerleon. He finds himself horribly lonely, he says—by the bye, Drakovics is said to be looking out for a wife for him, so that oughtn’t to last long—and I can see that he wants me to act as a sort of under-study for him as well. Drakovics is too important, both in view of the possibility of his being assassinated, and of his influence in the country. The King thinks that I might be useful in two ways, first, in getting some idea of the manner in which things are done, so that Drakovics’s removal might not necessarily mean the collapse of the whole system of government; and secondly, in keeping Drakovics himself from going too far. Of course Otto Georg, poor old fellow! can’t very well do that sort of thing for himself, but I think that I, as a friend of both parties, might be able to manage it.”

“I don’t envy you,” said Caerleon, drily.

“The position is delicate, but all the more interesting on that account,” said Cyril. “Drakovics has rather a liking for me, somehow or other, and if I can keep in with him, I might put the drag on when he is inclined to act in a regal way that few kings would stand. Otto Georg is a good fellow, and will see that I don’t have too much to do in the way of routine work. In fact, I can see that he wants me as a companion even more than as a secretary.”

“You are very young,” said the Princess, and Caerleon laughed unfeelingly, for only that evening he had told Cyril that he looked so young and so innocent, with his

pale face and thin hands, that all the ladies at the different ports would take him for a schoolboy. "You ought to have some one to take care of you."

"Ah, if Miss O'Malachy had only a sister to take pity on me!" sighed Cyril. "But as it is, I must wait and grow older before I can venture on a wife. When I come back from Bellaviste after thirty years or so of service with Otto Georg, and stay with you in England, Caerleon, I shall fix upon some sweet child just out of the schoolroom, with a comfortable fortune of her own. I shall not look young or innocent then. I shall be worn and grey, and slightly, very slightly, bald, and I shall hint darkly to the dear girl at unknown depths in my past history, with the description of which I will not pollute her ears. That will fetch her more than anything. The attentions of a man with a reputation for wickedness will set that girl on a pinnacle at once in her own estimation."

"I shall warn her against you," broke in Nadia, with righteous indignation.

"Do you think she would believe you?" asked Cyril, pityingly. "She would naturally take the first opportunity of asking me whether the charges against me were true. I need only look sad, and remark mournfully that it was easy enough for a man to go to the dogs, but hard indeed for him to recover himself when even his own relations were against him; and if that girl and her fortune were not promised to me before the interview was over, I don't know anything of human nature."

"This is merely one of Cyril's jokes, dear," whispered Caerleon behind Nadia's fan, as she sat looking puzzled and angry; and Cyril, who had overheard him, laughed and went on.

"I have another Bellaviste letter here, from our late master of the household, who tells me that there is no hope of recovering any of our personal property. The rebels looted the palace, and burned what they couldn't take away. The Assembly has voted us a handsome sum by way of compensation, but, alas! one cannot 'buy with gold the old associations.' I am especially sorry for you, Caerleon. Your rubies are gone."

"Oh, those rubies!" cried Caerleon.

"What rubies?" asked Nadia.

"A set of rubies which a certain lady of whom you may have heard (she is now the Princess of Dardania) presented to Caerleon with the request that he would hand them on to you," answered Cyril, promptly.

"I am glad they are lost. I would never have worn them," said Nadia, with decision. "Come," she said to Caerleon, "let us walk up and down the deck a little, Carlino. It is cold here."

Caerleon rose immediately, and when they were gone Cyril turned and looked benignly at the Princess. "Do you feel guilty?" he inquired. "I ask because I am morally certain that while I took occasion to speak to Caerleon last night for his good, you addressed a slight remonstrance to Miss Nadia. This is the result. Do you not feel appalled at the risk?"

"All marriages are risks," returned the Princess; "but I hope there will be less danger than usual about this one. In the first place, they cannot be married for six months at least, for it is not a year until August since your father's death, and they will learn to know each other very thoroughly during this tour of ours."

"There's a good deal in that," assented Cyril. "If people can keep the peace on board ship, they are pretty safe anywhere."

"Then," went on the Princess, "your brother is singularly calm and reasonable——"

"And therefore well fitted to cope with an unreasonable woman, you would say?" suggested Cyril.

"No," said the Princess, taking up the cudgels on behalf of her god-daughter, "Nadia is not unreasonable. She is very downright, and she sees only one thing at a time. I think you have a word for this characteristic of hers, but I forget it."

"One-idea'd?" said Cyril.

"Yes; that is it. And she will never do what she thinks is wrong."

"And she is always ready to be a martyr, and to make martyrs of other people. Would it be rude to ask you, Princess, to suggest to her that she has cultivated heroism long enough, and that the softer virtues of daily life might have a turn with advantage?"

"Our life in Scythia may not have been the best school for her," said the Princess, thoughtfully. "We Evangelicals have always been set apart—laughed at even when we were not persecuted, and such an experience fortifies one strongly against thinking too much of the opinion of others. It also develops, as you imply, one set of qualities rather at the expense of another set. And then she has that Irish faculty of concentration—blind devotion to an idea I have heard it called; but it need not necessarily be blind."

"Irish?" Cyril raised his eyebrows. "I should have said that I never met any one more unlike the typical Irish girl than Miss O'Malachy. Her brother, too, was extremely un-Hibernian."

"Ah, that is because you are thinking of the ordinary Irish type—Colonel O'Malachy's, for instance. Gay, what you call a 'good fellow,' always ready for a frolic,

possessing a keen sense of the ridiculous. But there is also another kind of Irishmen altogether. They have no sense of humour, or they would not preach under the protection of the police to howling mobs, or sacrifice their lives and their honour to some wrong-headed or hopeless cause. Nadia and her brother belong to this type, so do many conspirators, and not a few martyrs."

"This is rather a poor look-out for Caerleon," said Cyril.

"I don't think so. Nadia has learnt a lesson from the past month ; she is humbled, and she will have less confidence in her own judgment from henceforth. She has seen to-day something of your brother's true character, and the better she knows him, the more she will trust him. Then, they will not have the trial and temptation of idleness, for both of them are born workers. I look to see them do great things for God and His poor on your brother's estates in the provinces. They will strengthen each other's hands in the good work, and the opposition which they will encounter from the world will bind them more closely together at home."

"I suppose they will go in for closing all the public-houses on the estate, and that sort of thing," groaned Cyril. "By the bye, there was part of Stefanovics's letter that I didn't read. I didn't want to cast a damp over their first evening. King Otto Georg has repealed Caerleon's liquor law."

"Oh, no!" cried the Princess.

"He has, indeed. It seems that when the people found out that Caerleon wasn't killed, they wanted to have him back again, and there were riots in several places. The King and Drakovics were concerting measures for the maintenance of peace, when Drako-

vics was seized with a bright idea. ‘Repeal the liquor law,’ he said. ‘That will please the people, and release a sum of money, which you can apply to the relief of taxation.’ They were in a pretty tight place, so the King jumped at the idea, and the law was repealed just a week ago. Stefanovics says that the Carlinists were all going about in austere dignity, like so many Girondins, each man wearing his temperance medal with Caerleon’s head on it at his button-hole, and lamenting the virtues of the late reign, but the mass of the people accepted the bribe like a shot. There were no more Carlinist riots, and now any one can get drunk that likes.”

“It is a sad step backwards,” murmured the Princess.

“It is strange, isn’t it,” said Cyril, “that Miss O’Malachy should have failed to keep Caerleon on the throne, after all her trying, and that the one piece of his work which he hoped would last should be undone six weeks after he leaves Thracia? They have both failed utterly.”

“Some people’s failures are better than other people’s successes,” said the Princess, with unwonted sharpness. “I must say that I prefer your brother’s failure to the success which would have been yours had you been able to secure his remaining on the throne.”

“Well, I can congratulate myself that I did what I could to keep him there,” said Cyril, a little uncomfortably.

“Can you indeed congratulate yourself?” asked the Princess. “I do not know what your methods were, but I remember that you did not appear to look back upon them with complacency when you thought yourself dying.”

“Well, you know, I felt that I had played it rather

low down on Caerleon, and that isn't a thing one cares to think of."

"You schemed to separate your brother and his bride," said the Princess. "Whether you actually went beyond the truth in anything that you said I do not know; but it seems to me that you would not have called your conduct honourable in a private matter."

"That's just it. Public business is conducted on different principles."

"Is it? But why? Public considerations required, as you thought, that Carlino should not marry Nadia. Accordingly, you sought to separate them, and you succeeded for a time. Happily, you were not permanently successful, and your efforts were overruled for good. But of what use were your attempts? God did not intend your brother to be King of Thracia, and you could not keep him on the throne."

"But would you have one simply let things slide?"

"I would have you leave things to God. When you find that you can go no further in your chosen path without breaking His laws, is it not a sign that you are to stop there?"

"I don't wonder that you Evangelicals get yourselves banished as you do," said Cyril, smiling. "The ordinary Scythian view of diplomacy would certainly not agree with yours."

"You imply that ours is the English view? Then may I hope that you will act on English and not on Scythian principles when you return to Thracia?"

"Would you have me bind myself by a pledge, Princess?"

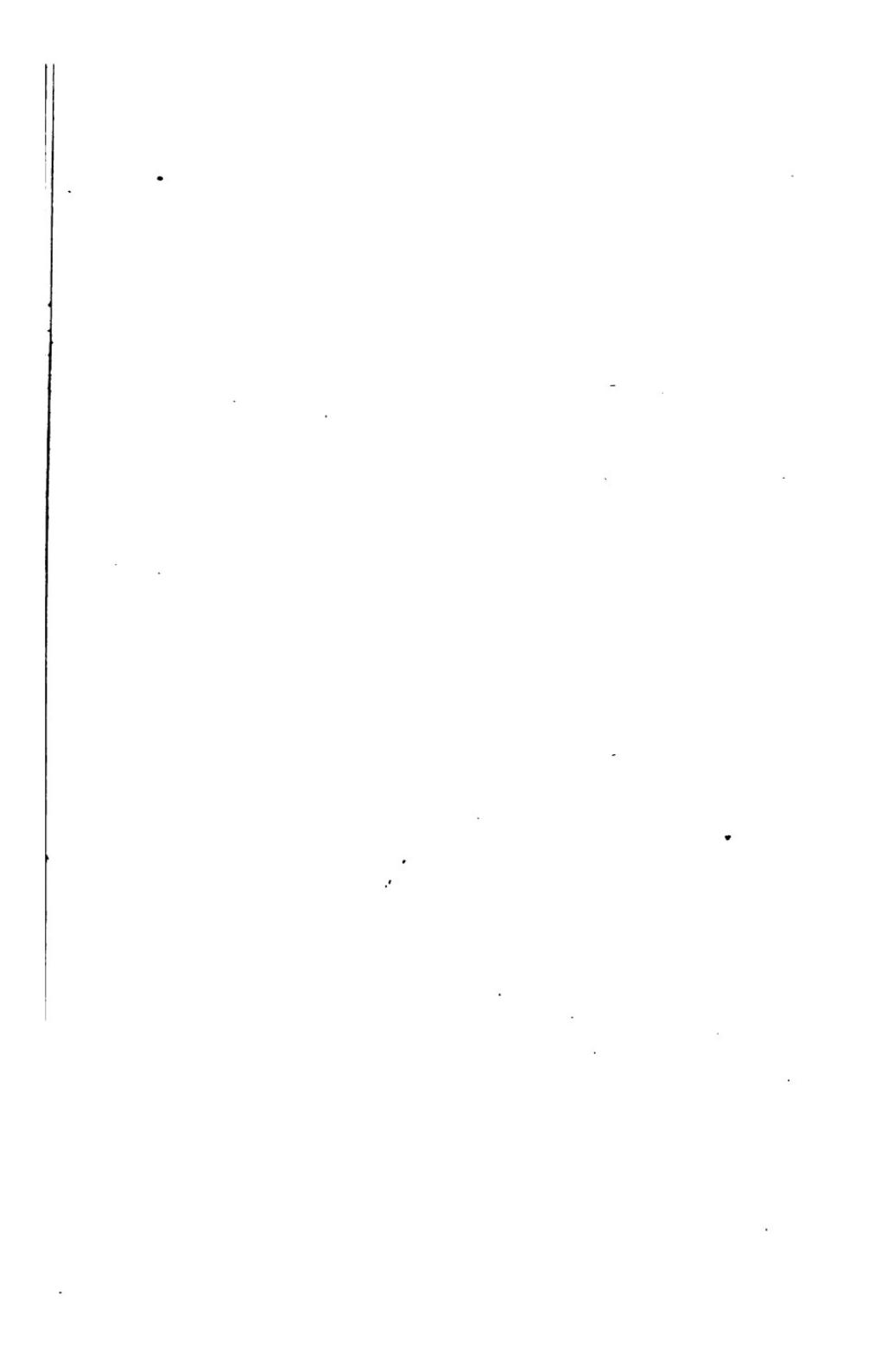
"Not unless you wish it. I only ask you to look back on the time you spent at Bellaviste, and the means

you used to force your brother to remain there, and to ask yourself, Was it worth while?"

"Considering that the result was failure, I think it was not," said Cyril, meditatively. "But I do not say that it would not have been worth while if I had succeeded."

"And what would your success have been worth?" asked the Princess. "If I were you, Lord Cyril, I would thank God night and morning that the end of your enterprise was failure."

THE END.



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